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Amicitia among Women:

Fellowship & Pious Practice in the *Vitae* of Italian Saints

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Abstract of the Dissertation

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Very broadly, friendship can be defined as a particular relationship between individuals that is reciprocal in nature. On the one hand, it is a relationship that is universal, but on the other hand friendship is a concept that is socially constructed and historicized through the meanings and functions a particular society gives to it and the ways in which the relationship is realized and performed. Furthermore, friendship is as much an idea as it is a lived experience. This dissertation examines friendship among women in medieval Italian cities of the thirteenth– and fourteenth– centuries. The primary focus of this study is an analysis of the hagiographies of a particular set of female saints from that period: women who leaned towards independence in their pious endeavors, or sought out new types of religious communities. In this period of spiritual experimentation when the authors of these texts were not sure quite how to present their subjects, these hagiographies provide unique insight into the female networks of companions and acquaintances in which the saints circulated. These holy women depended on other women for material, emotional, and spiritual support, yet at the same time the texts reveal a deep anxiety about these worldly connections. As representations of urban living, these narratives demonstrate the importance of friendship in the lives of medieval Italian women. Furthermore, the centrality of relationships beyond those of blood or kin was a key feature of Italian urban society. Within this context, a new model for friendship was developing, one that took elements from the traditional philosophical ideals of perfect friendship but applied them towards a society whose stability depended on a variety of overlapping connections of blood, kin, guild, parish, and neighborhood. Although women were not citizens or civic participants in the legal sense that there husbands, fathers, and brothers were, friendship was still a means through which women constructed their civil identity.

Dedication Page

For Jackson, Madeleine, and Milo

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Introduction

The slighting of female friendship is part, then, of the more general slighting and devaluation of those activities of women that go beyond their traditional connections to men and family.

Fern L. Johnson and Elizabeth J. Aries, "The Talk of Women Friends"[1]

As Brian Patrick McGuire writes in the introduction to his book about medieval monastic friendship, friendship is a universal social phenomenon; yet as he and other historians examining friendship have argued, while every time and place might have "friends" what that entails is different and varied.[2] Today, friendships might be formed – and sometimes severed – with a few clicks of a mouse, while in the high Middle Ages, bonds of friendships might have been made official through sworn oaths. In our present age, how an individual identifies one's "community" and interacts with it has dramatically changed in just a few short years, thanks to the advent of social networking and web 2.0, but most of us also acknowledge a difference between "Facebook friends" and our most intimate confidants. Friendship has been a topic of inquiry taken up by philosophers since the days of Aristotle, and, under the rubric of friendship theory, by all manners of academic thinkers, from sociologists to anthropologists to historians, in our present age.[3] But friendship is a

[1] Fern L. Johnson and Elizabeth J. Aries, "The Talk of Women Friends," *Women's Studies International Forum* 6, no. 4 (1983): 354.
[2] Brian Patrick McGuire, *Friendship and Community: The Monastic Experience 350 - 1250* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1988), ix.
[3] Interestingly, every academic discussion of friendship I have come across, from the medieval to the modern, has begun with Aristotle and his *Nichomachean Ethics*.

particularly ambiguous concept. Thus we might begin with a definition. The very useful *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* supplies this one:

> [Friendship is a] distinctively personal relationship that is grounded in a concern on the part of each friend for the welfare of the other, for the other's sake, and that involves some degree of intimacy. As such, friendship is undoubtedly central to our lives, in part because the special concern we have for our friends must have a place within a broader set of concerns, including moral concerns, and in part because our friends can help shape who we are as persons.[4]

The first part of this definition outlines the most basic elements of friendship – care for one's friend and a particular closeness. Using such a definition should make it easy to find and identify instances of friendship, in the past and in the present. But the second part, which speaks to the centrality of that relationship and the way it shapes individuals, reflects the value that a particular society or culture might place on this relationship, particularly in comparison to other relationships and human groupings. This last part is more reflective of a modern conception of friendship, one that may not hold up in every historical circumstance. Thus to identify relationships that look like friendship is a relatively simply task, but understanding how a particular society interpreted and gave meaning to that relationship is more challenging.[5]

This dissertation seeks to do both those things, in the specific context of the urban centers of late medieval Italy. It examines friendships between women in religious (either traditional convents or more casual situations) and urban communities in thirteenth– and fourteenth–century Italy. Through an analysis of a selection of *vitae* of holy women from

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[4] Bennett Helm, "Friendship," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2013 Edition)* (2013), http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2013/entries/friendship/.
[5] "Simple" does not imply unimportant, however, as identifying friendships within a given context is important to the second task of understanding the meaning of that friendship.

the period, it presents both the representations that circulated about friendship between women as well as the lived experience of women in these relationships. This dissertation evolved from a series of questions about female friendship in the medieval world: what did friendship mean when it was between two women? What obligations and actions determined the existence and shaped the contours of such a relationship? What was the function of friendship for women? And finally, in what contexts were friendships formed, and how did these relationships construct or affirm networks of community and kinship? As represented in the *vitae* of holy women venerated in their hometowns and cities, friendship was an integral part of women's lives, and friends depended on each other for material, emotional, and spiritual support. Furthermore, these relationships were shaped by the urban environment in which the women lived and served God.

While friendship has been a topic of scholarship since antiquity, as the quotation that began this introduction makes clear friendship among women has often been absent from this millennia–old scholarly pursuit. While the thinkers of both antiquity and the medieval world defined the relationship of *amicitia* in various ways, an essential quality of a potential friend was a degree of virtue only obtainable by men. It is perhaps, then, not all that unexpected that the medieval "friend" in treatises on *amicitia* was implicitly male; it remains, however, somewhat surprising that women are often absent from most modern scholarly analyses of friendship in the Middle Ages, although that absence is increasingly being noticed and rectified. For example, Brian Patrick McGuire's *Friendship and Community*, a particularly comprehensive study of friendship in the monastery, referenced in the first paragraph, was taken to task for its lack of analysis of friendship among

women.[6] A 1999 collection of essays, with the inclusive title of *Friendship in Medieval Europe*, includes no essays that consider friendships among women, and even a cursory reading through the index reveals a deficiency of women, either as a group or as individuals.[7] A similar experience can be had when searching either the term "friendship" or "*amicitia*" in the International Medieval Bibliography. Indeed, only six results turn up for the subject search "friendship – of women." Most studies of medieval friendship, whether in the context of a philosophical concept or as a social relationship, implicitly or explicitly understand *amicitia* as a relationship primarily between men. When women are included as participants in such a relationship, it is most often with the rubric of "spiritual friendship" between women and men.[8]

The likely, and not invalid, reason for the absence of women's friendship as a topic of modern scholarship is their absence in the medieval philosophical writings. Thus, including or addressing female friendship in an analysis framed by the theoretical concepts of *amicitia* must be a conscious inclusion made by the historian. Even if, according to medieval theorists, men were the only sex capable of entering into *amicitia*, restricting discussion of medieval friendship to the realms of philosophy and – on occasion – religious

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[6] Ann E. Matter, "Brian Patrick Mc Guire, *Friendship and Community: The Monastic Experience, 350-1250*," *Speculum* 68, no. 4 (1993). One can make the same criticism of McGuire's 2002 book, *Friendship and Faith: Cistercian Men, Women and their Stories, 1100 – 1250* (Aldershot: Ashgate).

[7] Julian Haseldine, ed. *Friendship in Medieval Europe* (Stroud: Sutton, 1999).

[8] See, for example, Ruth Mazo Karras, "Friendship and Love in the Lives of Two Twelfth–Century English Saints," *Journal of Medieval History* 14, no. 4 (1988), Blossom Stefaniw, "Spiritual Friendship and Bridal Mysticism in an Age of Affectivity," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (2006), and the following articles included in Albrecht Classen's and Marilyn Sandidge's *Friendship in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age*: "On Rhetoric and Friendship in the Letters of Heloise and Abelard" by Jennifer Consantine–Jackson and "The Spiritual Friendship of Henry Suso and Elisabeth Stagel" by David F. Tinsley.

rhetoric would limit a potentially rich analytical approach to medieval society. Both in the Middle Ages and in the 21st century, friendship exists simultaneously as a philosophical concept and an aspect of every day life. Certainly if we limit ourselves to explicit discussions of friendship, we will come up short: in both antiquity and the Middle Ages, there were no treatises of any nature that specifically discuss friendship among women.[9] This might lead some to suggest that no evidence exists for female friendship or of friendship between a man and a woman, as Alan Bray concluded in reference to his examination of friendship in English medieval and Renaissance literary works.[10] To be sure, the use of the words *amicitia* or *amica* in reference to relationships between women is rare indeed, and, as has already been noted, women by their nature were naturally excluded from philosophical treatises regarding friendship, but there is plenty to say on the topic, if we look beyond those texts, both classical and medieval within which the language of *amicitia* is explicitly used. Examining the interactions of medieval people in relationships that we would identify and understand as friendship – regardless of language used in the historical record – is certainly a useful and fruitful exercise, as a means of accessing greater knowledge of lived experiences and structures in society.

The challenge of finding evidence of friendship among medieval women is two–fold: there is, without a doubt, a general lack of visibility of women in the historical record, whether in archival or literary sources, compared to men. Second, women are so often

[9] This observation is based on my own research, but I am not alone. See, for example, Albrecht Classen, "Friendship - the Quest for a Human Ideal and Value from Antiquity to the Early Modern Time," ibid. (Walter de Gruyter). This very lengthy introduction to this edited collection of essays includes three sections pertaining to women's friendships specifically. In the collection itself, the editors seem to have taken care to include essays about women and their friendships, with both men and other women.
[10] Alan Bray, *The Friend* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

found in the historical record within the context of their familial and maternal roles; consequently, historians must sift through and engage a wider range of sources in unique ways in order to uncover their history. This sort of exercise is nothing new for scholars of women's history. As Marilyn Sandidge points out: "Much of the new scholarship about women's friendships grows out of the readers' understanding that they must look beyond the male–centered language patterns and literary forms in order to recognize the full involvement of women in, especially, medieval works."[11] Yet we should assume that both men and women of the medieval period lived far richer lives than what is presented in a most basic reading of the existent sources. An analysis of friendship among women in the Middle Ages is not simply about tracing evidence of female friends, but also about gaining a fuller perspective on the lives and experiences of these women beyond, or in addition to, their traditional roles constrained through familial obligations, about which historical evidence is more easily accessible. Thus, this dissertation seeks to both examine friendship within a genre of historical sources (the *vitae* primarily, but a small collections of wills will also be examined), and in doing so present a new methodology for seeking out and understanding the lives of medieval women generally.

This dissertation will focus on the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, which, especially in Italy, are a particularly interesting period within which to analyze women's friendship because of two different, but overlapping, developments: one spiritual and one social. The twelfth and thirteenth centuries witnessed a proliferation of religious and spiritual movements, from the new mendicant orders started by Francis and Dominic to

[11]Marilyn Sandidge, "Women and Friendship," in *Friendship in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Ages*, ed. Albrecht Classen and Marilyn Sandidge (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), 93.

urban lay confraternities whose members came together for charity and prayer. Women who sought more active and individual ways to demonstrate their spirituality than could be had in traditional convents often found and carved out those opportunities within the context of the new religious movements. Indeed, this proliferation of female lay saints – and specifically the *vitae* that were written about them – has provided me with a valuable set of sources. The latter half of the Middle Ages also constituted a period of change within the urban environment of Italy. While throughout the Middle Ages, Italy had been more urbanized than areas north of the Alps, beginning in the eleventh century its cities grew more rapidly in population and wealth, and increasingly took the form of city–states with republican values and strong civic culture. Within this atmosphere, new types of networks began to form alongside those of the family and kinship, and men *and* women had to negotiate new – and often separate – social networks.

The proliferation of religious and spiritual movements in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries allowed men and women to seek God in varied ways both within and outside the cloister. While the ecclesiastical reforms of Gregory VII sought primarily to affirm the authority of the clergy through the assertion of a strict notion of a worthy priest, some of the laity began to question or reject outright the assumption that the clergy, both secular and regular, were the only people who had access to a truly Christian way of life.[12] This questioning took many forms, from the new mendicant orders started by Francis and

[12] Herbert Grundmann, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages*, trans. Steven Rowan (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 7-9.

Dominic, to urban lay confraternities, to the rise in heretical or semi–heretical movements such as the Waldensians and the Humiliati.[13]

A number of factors contributed to the growing numbers of not just female lay saints, but laywomen in general who engaged in pious activity in the secular world. Entrance into the convent, the traditional – and, up until the twelfth century, the sole – spiritual avenue available to women, was increasingly constrained by the requirement of a dowry.[14] Despite the fact that the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 prohibited dowry requirements for entrance into a convent, this practice persisted well into the sixteenth century.[15] Thus many women, in particular those of the rising mercantile classes, began to search out new ways of expressing their religious devotion. Even if the convent was an option, these women, perhaps accustomed to city life, were neither willing nor interested in entering a convent, desiring to serve God in more active ways.[16] Often, at least in the beginning, these new "movements" were simply small groups of like–minded women: Walter Simons, for example, describes how in the cities of the Low Countries in the early thirteenth century, unconnected groups of women began to form small communities. While these communities would eventually become officially recognized as *beguinages*, in the

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[13] For a particularly thorough exploration of this period of spiritual zeal and experimentation in the urban Italian context, see Augustine Thompson, OP, *Cities of God: The Religion of the Italian Communes 1125-1325* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005).

[14] Eileen Power described English nunneries as "essentially aristocratic institutions, the refuge of the gently born," a description that characterized convents throughout medieval Europe. Eileen Power, *Medieval English Nunneries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), 4.

[15] James G. Clark, *The Benedictines in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2011), 146-47.

[16] In the fourteenth century convents throughout Europe admitted more daughters of wealthy urban families, but remained fairly "exclusive." Clark, *The Benedictines in the Middle Ages*, 68.

beginning they were simply informal gatherings of local women who sought a new form of community and active devotion. For many women, such as Mary of Oignies, these groups might have served as spaces for transition on the way to a more traditional life as a cloistered nun, but not always.[17] Nor was this phenomenon restricted to Northern Europe; on his journey to the Curia in 1216 to have the newly formed Beguines recognized, Jacques de Vitry noticed that communities of uncloistered religious women, casting aside their material concerns, were sprouting up all over Europe.[18] Herbert Grundmann's analysis of this western European–wide movement suggests there existed a certain widespread urge among the women of Western Europe, a desire for the *vita apostolica* that could not be suppressed. This was despite Canon XIII of the Fourth Lateran Council banning the establishment of new orders, and the general discomfort of the Curia with religious communities of women who were neither bound to a specific rule nor under the supervision of a male order. Such irrepressibility can be seen in the efforts of women to join orders that actively excluded them. Indeed, although the Cistercians instituted a ban prohibiting the founding of women's houses in 1225, Katherine French writes that, quite simply "the Cistercians were not able to keep women out of their order."[19] And if a group of women could not find an order or house to take on the task, well "these women formed communities belonging to no order at all, following no specific rule, but binding themselves

[17] Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies: Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries, 1200 - 1565* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).
[18] Grundmann, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages*, 76.
[19] Katherine L. French, "Religion and Popular Beliefs: Choices, Constraints, and Creativity for Christian Women," in *A Cultural History of Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Kim M. Phillips (London: Bloomsbury, 2013). On the history of Cistercian nuns see, for example, Constance H. Berman, *Women and Monasticism in Medieval Europe: Sisters and Patrons of the Cistercian Reform* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2002 and Anne E Lester, *Creating Cistercian Nuns: The Women's Religious Movement and Its Reform in Thirteenth-Century Champagne* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2011).

in all strictness to commandments of female piety in chastity and poverty, prayer and fasting."[20]

Women in northern Italy were particularly inspired by the growing orders of the Franciscans and Dominicans, who lived among the people instead of abandoning the world. The Papacy was, not surprisingly, more than a little concerned with the idea of women pursuing the *vita apostolica* in imitation of Francis and Dominic, whose friars were not cloistered, survived by begging, and were called upon to preach. More troublesome was that while many of these spiritually–minded women sought guidance from local friars, they generally chose to pursue independent and individualistic lives, free from the constraints of general lay practicalities like marriage and family, but also from the usual limitations placed on devout women. Like the early Beguines, Italian women who felt such a spiritual calling were not about to be shut up in a traditional monastery, or abandon their independence to the authority of a community administered through the mendicant orders, even if they turned to Franciscans and Dominicans to provide some spiritual guidance. These women saw an opportunity to gain salvation without taking the veil and abandoning the world, and instead chose to live as penitents in the midst of lay society. Unlike the Beguines, however, many Italian laywomen embraced a more solitary lifestyle, often opting to live on their own instead of among a larger community of women. This might have been because unlike their more rural sisters, urban Italian women had many more spiritual venues or resources available to them, in particular the numbers of mendicant friars who

[20] Grundmann, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages*, 78.

could oversee their religious lives and ensure they remained above scandal.[21] Most – but not all – of the lay women saints were from the wealthier classes whose families continued to provide some support – usually in the form of a living space attached to the family home – even when they generally disapproved of a daughter or sister's spiritual desires. Many were also widows with children, who, having done their familial duty, had more freedom than a virgin daughter might have enjoyed. Even when religious–minded women opted to form some sort of community, the exact nature of these communities is unclear, especially as many such communities remained poorly documented.[22]

During the same period, yet another phenomenon was occurring: Italy in the later half of the Middle Ages produced a particularly high number of "saints."[23] In their extensive study of medieval and early modern sainthood, Donald Weinstein and Rudolph Bell identify the years between 1200–1540 as "the era of . . . the northern Italian urban saint."[24] Their volume examines some 864 cases of sainthood from the year 1000 to 1700. Their list of saints, borrowed from Pierre Delooz, is not intended to be either an official or complete list,

[21] French, "Religion and Popular Beliefs: Choices, Constraints, and Creativity for Christian Women." French argues that urban women had a number of religious avenues available to them that may not have been present for women in rural areas, including access to Mendicant confessors.
[22] Ibid., 66-67.
[23] Here I am using the term "saint" to identify men and women whose own communities identified them as holy persons, a common practice used by other scholars, including André Vauchez, Donald Weinstein, and Rudolph M. Bell, whose fundamental works on saints and sanctity I have cited. Only a few of these individuals have been formally canonized by the papacy as official saints. Others have been beatified, but some remain officially unrecognized.
[24] Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell, *Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000-1700* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982).

but to paraphrase, good enough to provide meaningful statistics.[25] The thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were particularly replete with Italian saints, as Weinstein and Bell's statistical analysis demonstrates. Thus in the thirteenth century, Italy produced 79 out of 159 saints and in the fourteenth century 74 out of 107. That is, 50% and 69% respectively, and is significantly more than other European nations for the same period; for example, in the thirteenth century, the second highest "producer" of saints was France with a total of 24 or 15% of saints.[26] Moreover, Weinstein and Bell identify the thirteenth through to the fifteenth centuries as the "era of the female saint," during which time the proportion of female saints rose from less than 12% to between 22 and 28%.[27] In Italy, during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries combined, of the 153 Italian saints, thirty-five of those were women, or 22.8%. Thus, during these two centuries, we have an interesting convergence of factors at play, with the result being a high proportion of Italian female saints.

The characteristics that made individual sanctity recognizable to the saint's observers – his or her background, role in the community, the ways in which their extreme holiness was manifested, for example – changed and developed over time. In the earliest days of Christianity, the holiest men and women were those who sacrificed their lives in martyrdom for their Christian faith, but once Christianity became mainstream, the most devout had to demonstrate their faith in other ways, usually through living an extremely

[25] Ibid. See pages 277–279 for a discussion of the authors' selection process. Delooz's classification and lists of saints can be found in Pierre Delooz, *Sociologie Et Canonisations* (Liege: Faculte de Driot, 1969).
[26] Weinstein and Bell, *Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000-1700*. These figures are based on the year of birth of the saint in question.
[27] Ibid., 220.

pious and ascetic life, apart from society with its worldly and everyday concerns. Thus during the Middle Ages, most saints were members of the clergy or holy orders – monks, nuns, particularly devout bishops – with the odd king or queen thrown in for good measure. With the rise of lay piety, discussed above, came the rise of the non-royal lay saint, although he or she was often affiliated with a monastic order. Lay piety demanded that men and women seek devotion within the structures of their daily lives; lay saints were an extension of this project, mastering piety without the "freedom" of escaping the world. Of course, among both men and women, the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries produced many saints from both the traditional and mendicant orders. But these centuries – particularly in Italy – were also the era of lay sanctity; no longer was sainthood the privilege of those who had abandoned the world.[28]

Alongside these many spiritual and religious developments, many of the cities of the northern and central regions of Italy were undergoing political and civil upheaval. In the latter decades of the eleventh century, a number of Italian cities began to reorganize as communes.[29] A developing concept of citizenship bonded people together on different bases than kinship or lineage. Of course, blood relations remained important, and continued to be fundamental to an individual's identity and network, but in the context of the urban commune other social bonds took shape alongside kinship. In the early communal period, the nobility and bourgeoisie sought to form bonds that expanded

[28] See, in particular, "A Twelfth–Century Novelty: The Lay Saints of Urban Italy" in Andre Vauchez, *The Laity in the Middle Ages: Religious Practices and Experiences*, trans. Margery J. Schneider (Notre Dame: Univeristy of Notre Dame, 1993).
[29] For a recent general overview of the communal period see: P. J. Jones, "Communes and Despots: The City State in Late-Medieval Italy," in *Communes and Despots in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, ed. John E. Law and Bernadette Paton (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010).

beyond kinship.[30] For the noble elite, these bonds were crucial to overthrowing imperial rule as well as to establishing and maintaining one's familial status against other noble families.

The geography and demography of Italian cities are important elements in understanding the various factions and associations that were formed. Noble society toward the end of the eleventh century became increasingly violent. This violence was played out in the urban fabric as the narrow streets of medieval Italian cities were easily blocked off to provide urban fortresses for the most powerful families. Magnate – or noble – families of shared lineage and interest came together to form sworn associations called *consorteria.* These associations, whose primary purpose was the protection of persons, property, and interests of their sworn members, were not unlike medieval guilds, with their own regulations and statutes, governing bodies, and armed and salaried militia. The *consorterie* are also known as tower societies because of their proclivity toward building towers as strategies of defense against other noble factions. These towers also served as symbols of wealth and power.[31] Bridges high above the city streets and, less often, tunnels underground, linked the towers of various families who formed *consorterie*. Although connected to or built above the family home, the towers themselves were not inhabited.[32]

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[30] The more common term for the bourgeois class in Italy was the *popolo.*

[31] Tower societies were particularly prevalent in the cities of Tuscany. In many cities, most of these towers were torn down in conjunction with the rise of the *popolo*, but one can still get a (limited) feel for what the medieval urban skyline of an Italian city would have been like in the small Tuscan walled city of San Gimignano. Currently listed as UNESCO world heritage site, San Gimignano once boasted 72 such towers, of which 14 have survived, although a few towers exist in most of the cities of Italy where such societies developed.

[32] On the *consorterie* and their towers see: J. K. Hyde, *Society and Politics in Medieval Italy: The Evolution of the Civil Life, 1000-1350* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973), 56-57, and

While these magnate families had been able to free their cities from foreign rule, during much of the twelfth into the thirteenth centuries the constant warfare among them often resulted in what can best be described as a period of anarchy in numerous cities across central Italy. These magnate families also controlled the urban governments, but their inability or lack of desire to maintain peace amongst themselves made their control of urban affairs an economic liability to the rising merchant classes of the cities, who increasingly denounced the ongoing violence. While many of the wealthiest, non–aristocratic citizens were at least peripherally involved in city government, often through the role of advisor, the power of this class was severely limited, as it was the *consorterie* who dominated communal government. However as the twelfth century progressed, the wealthiest *arti* (guilds) – usually those of merchants – were able to effectively stand against and limit the chaotic power of the magnate families. In the first few decades of the thirteenth century, these *arti* were able to either expel some aristocratic families or effectively limit their role in governing the cities.[33] Often this included razing those towers to the ground and prohibiting noble families from holding public office. These changing political circumstances – commonly known as the rise of the *popolo* – allowed for new forms of social and civil organization to develop, often outside or apart from the bonds of blood and kin. While these historical developments (spiritual and political) were quite

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Lauro Martines, *Power and Imagination: City States in Renaissance Italy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 35-37.

[33] *Power and Imagination: City States in Renaissance Italy*, 41. While many Italian cities experienced a similar development in terms of government, the traditional nobility retained power in some cities, most notably Venice. Still, this transition from Imperial rule to aristocratic oligarchy to communal government was sufficiently widespread in northern and central Italy to mark the period from 1100–1350 as that of the communes.

different, together they have provided a unique set of circumstances and sources through which to examine the lives and experiences of women.

This dissertation will begin by discussing the fundamentals of friendship theory in the Middle Ages. Chapter One will trace the history and historiography of medieval concepts of friendship. It opens with an overview of the main philosophical ideals of friendship and how they were reinterpreted and redefined for a Christian society. While these sorts of texts and ideas were largely discussed and circulated within monasteries, convents, and universities, they both reflected and shaped how broader medieval society thought about friendship. Chapter One will also explore some of the recent historiography of friendship, and in particular some approaches that have been taken to uncover and analyze women's friendship. I will conclude the chapter by further considering why and how women were excluded implicitly and explicitly from ideals of friendship.

Chapters Two and Three both focus on a close analysis of the various *vitae* that are at the center of this study. Chapter Two will discuss the social and religious context of the new urban lay holy women who were the subjects of the *vitae* examined in that chapter. In utilizing the *vitae* as sources of women's friendships, Chapter Two will discus the roles of female companions in the lives of independent holy women, arguing that friendship and community were necessary to lay penitential life for many women. Furthermore as the *vitae* of lay religious women acted as models for other laywomen, those representations of friendship in the *vitae* reflect the function of female friendship in urban life.

While Chapter Two examines friendship and community as a "practical" aspect of the life of the lay holy woman, Chapter Three will examine the ways in which the authors of the *vitae*, commonly called hagiographers, made friendship an element of the holy woman's sanctity as either a spiritual good or something that needed to be overcome. This chapter will consider those same *vitae* of independent lay holy women discussed in Chapter Two, but will also include the *vitae* of some women who opted for a more communal lifestyle, although even those women chose to enter a religious community – or more often founded one of their own – were experimenting with new forms of spirituality and communal living. In this chapter, I will discuss both the spiritual purpose of female companions as depicted in the *vitae* as well as how friendship or networks of women could also pose a challenge to the life of the holy laywoman.

Chapter Four will move away from the *vitae* as forms of representation, and begin with an examination of the civic and civil functions of urban associations and friendships in medieval Italian cities. In those contexts, friendship had a different meaning and purpose than what we see within the philosophical or theological views of friendship. This chapter will also discuss how friendship was represented in the works of some of the most influential writers of late medieval Italy: Brunetto Latini, Dante, and Boccaccio. In urban Italy, friendship became a marker of civil identity as well as a civil and social tool and strategy for the citizens of Italian city–states. While women were neither citizens in their own right, nor part of official civic society, there is evidence that for women, too, friendships were one avenue through which they defined their civil role. The fourth chapter ends with a case study of a set of wills of female testators from the Tuscan city of Lucca. Read as public statements, they provide some evidence that women did indeed see

their associations with other females as important to their civil identity in life and how they wanted to be remembered in death. While the wills themselves are quite limited in the evidence they can provide, this brief analysis demonstrates that such records, when examined alongside other sources like the *vitae,* can and do offer insight into the lived experiences of medieval Italian women, an aspect that is often missing from the historical narrative.

Chapter I: The Medieval Rhetoric(s) of Friendship

Our knowledge of pre–modern ideas about friendship has been largely constructed from philosophical or theological theories of human (and divine) relations or from formal expressions of friendship, as can be found in letters of patronage, for example. Formal conceptions of friendship in which reciprocity and usefulness are often significant elements appear to have a degree of artifice that runs counter to how many of us understand friendship today. Then, as now, friendship is a concept difficult to define, and in the past, just as today, there existed multiple and overlapping ideas of what friendship meant and how friendship was practiced. This chapter will consider the philosophical and theological models of friendship that circulated in the Middle Ages, as well as address the exclusion of explicit considerations of gender in medieval friendship theories and modern historical analysis alike.

Classical Models of *Amicitia*

Medieval philosophers and theologians who were deeply interested in the question of friendship readily adopted the theories and models of friendship articulated by classical philosophers, adjusting them to fit a Christian society and ideology. Classical philosophers universally attributed a natural quality to friendship, holding that it was human nature to seek out companionship. It was also universally held that friendship was a valuable relationship, for the individual and for society. For classical philosophers, friendship was interconnected with both virtue and happiness, but among different philosophers and philosophical strains, there was considerable variety in how these three qualities interacted with and related to each other. Over the course of the long medieval period, as

texts were re–discovered and classical philosophers came into or fell out of fashion, different theories of friendship came into circulation, but the main philosophical models of friendship adapted by later medieval thinkers were Stoic friendship and Aristotelian friendship. This chapter will examine classical friendship in reverse chronology – first the Stoics and then Aristotle – as Aristotelian works were virtually unknown in medieval Europe until the 13th century.

To a contemporary reader not steeped in classical philosophy, at least some aspects of perfect Stoic friendship might seem quite peculiar. Stoics held that only sages – those individuals who had attained moral perfection – were capable of perfect friendship. Among sages, natural affinity and the achievement of virtue created friendship, but this friendship was dependent on disinterestedness and a lack of emotion or passion. Sages were friends for the sake of friendship, not for any utility or benefit that fellowship could bring. They were also reliable friends, as sages could not be moved by flattery and were not driven to anger or jealousy. Since a sage was indifferent to even life itself, he would not mourn his dead friend, and since a likeness in virtue is what drew friends together, that dead friend could easily be replaced.[34] While it might appear that Stoicism restricted friendship to a few, it was actually the opposite, at least in theory; the ultimate end of the Stoic model of

[34] For an overview of the Stoic model of friendship see: Glen Lesses, "Austere Friends: The Stoics and Friendship," *Apeiron* 26, no. 1 (1993).

friendship is universal friendship.[35] Thus taken to its rational conclusion, perfect Stoic friendship encompassed all men, through moral obligation and perfected virtue.[36]

Stoicism was transmitted to later Christian thinkers particularly through the works of Cicero, who was greatly admired throughout the medieval period. He recognized the Stoic ideal of universal friendship but also granted considerable value to personal relationships. Stoicism did not deny that those who had not attained moral perfection could create friendships, and recognized that these friendships were also natural. Since the friends in question lacked perfection, so did the relationship; such friendships lacked the stability and indifference of perfect friendship. However, Cicero placed considerably more value on personal relationships than the Hellenistic Stoics, and friendship was a major theme in their writings.

Cicero's concept of friendship is primarily outlined in his text *Laelius De Amicitia*, written around 44 BCE. The text was composed as a fictional dialogue between and about real historical figures: the Roman statesman Gaius Laelius Sapiens (fl. 2nd century BCE), and his two sons–in–law. In the work Laelius discusses the qualities of friendship following the death of his good friend, the younger Scipio Africanus (185–129 BCE). Through this dialogue, Cicero attributed aspects of perfect Stoic friendship to individual relationships, but his construction of friendship was less austere and worldlier than the Stoic ideal. As with true Stoic friendship, Ciceronian friendship originated from nature and was founded

[35] Eoin G. Cassidy, "'He Who Has Friends Can Have No Friend': Classical and Christian Perspectives on the Limits of Friendship," in *Friendship in Medieval Europe*, ed. Julian Haseldine (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1999), 52.
[36] While in theory, universal friendship was the ultimate and rational goal, in practice few individuals would have been capable of obtaining the status of sage, and certain individuals would be excluded outright – women for example, on the basis of their gender.

on mutual virtue. He defined it as "a community of views on all matters human and divine, together with goodwill and affection."[37] According to Cicero, only good men were capable of becoming friends, men "who behave and live in such a way that people praise their honesty, integrity, fairness and generosity, and have in them nothing of greed, intemperance or shamelessness, being also endowed with great strength of character . . ."[38] Their respective virtue was what drew men into friendship, but that relationship was made rich through their goodwill to each other: a friend was someone whom you talked with openly, who took pleasure in your joys, and who was empathetic about your misfortunes. Indeed a friend felt more joy or more grief than you.[39] That sense of goodwill, although not the origin of friendship, was what held friendship together. Unlike familial bonds, friendship fails without goodwill, and this makes the bond of friendship superior to family.[40]

For Cicero it was essential that particular friendships not be based on utility or need.[41] As with pure Stoic friendship, Cicero's model contained an air of disinterest: "an individual excels most in the acquisition and preservation of friendships according as he is fortified with good qualities and wisdom in himself and stands least in need of another, regarding everything that concerns him as within his own control."[42] Those most successful in friendship tended to be those who had mastered Stoic indifference, that is those who

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[37] Marcus Tullius Cicero, *On Friendship & the Dream*, trans. J. G. F. Powell (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1990).
[38] Ibid., 37.
[39] Ibid., 39.
[40] Ibid., 37.
[41] Cassidy, "'He Who Has Friends Can Have No Friend': Classical and Christian Perspectives on the Limits of Friendship," 54.
[42] Cicero, *On Friendship & the Dream*, 43.

were “radically detached from anything subject to external contingency," such as wealth, status, health or even life itself.[43] Cicero, however, accepted that through friendship, there was the possibility of benefits. Friends were friends because of a natural affinity of mind and there was no purpose to friendship beyond the intrinsic value of that relationship. But that was not to say that friendship was without its advantages. There was the goodwill that friendship relied on, which had its own advantages, of course, but what of friends who were of unequal status or wealth? Cicero acknowledged that it was often the case that in a circle of friends, one man was often above the others; he who was superior should treat everyone as equals, and those who were inferior should not be drawn into envy. But Cicero’s interpretation of friendship also included aspects of Stoic communality: “If a person possesses some outstanding quality, either in character or in intellectual gifts or in wealth, he should share it with his friends and hold it in common with those around him. . . .”[44] It was a normal extension of the kindness born of goodwill toward each other to provide advantages for one’s friends. And while Cicero acknowledged that some relationships based on utility might often be called friendship, he insisted that this label was false, since even if advantages arose from friendship, perfect friendship originated from shared natural virtue.

Of the classical authors, it was Aristotle who was the first to formulate a complete theory of friendship, found in books eight and nine of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, although much of the *Ethics* was not known in the western Europe until it was translated in the mid

[43] Lesses, "Austere Friends: The Stoics and Friendship," 60.
[44] Cicero, *On Friendship & the Dream*, 61.

thirteenth–century.[45] James McEvoy posits that the discovery of Aristotle was a "watershed in the history of friendship–theory" and once scholastics started reading Aristotle, they virtually abandoned Cicero, seeing Aristotle as the "fountain at which the Roman orator had drunk."[46] The theories posited by Cicero and Aristotle certainly shared many of the same characteristics, but personal friendships were paramount to Aristotle. Unlike in Stoicism, according to Aristotle's view, one's number of friends was limited. But there was agreement that friendship was born of nature and dependent on virtue.

Aristotle identified three kinds of friendship, differentiated by the motivations behind them. The first two kinds of friendship were based on pleasure and usefulness, but of these Aristotle said:

> when the useful is the basis of affection, men love because of the good they get out of it, and when pleasure is the basis, for the pleasure they get out of it. In other words, the friend is loved not because he is a friend but because he is useful or pleasant.[47]

These first two kinds of friendship are transitory, ending when the friend is no longer useful or pleasant, yet Aristotle is willing to call these relationships friendship, nonetheless. The third is perfect friendship, defined as "that between good men who are alike in

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[45] Reginald Hyatte, *The Arts of Friendship: The Idealization of Friendship in Medieval and Early Renaissance Literature* (Leiden: Brill), 16.
[46] James McEvoy, "The Theory of Friendship in the Latin Middle Ages: Hermeneutics, Contextualization and the Transmission and Reception of Ancient Texts and Ideas, from *C.* Ad 350 to *C.* 1500," in *Friendship in Medieval Europe*, ed. Julian Haseldine (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1999), 14, 27. Modern friendship theorists also begin their analysis with Aristotle. Thus the online *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, which provides excellent overviews of philosophical topics, begins its article on Friendship with a discussion of Aristotle. Helm, "Friendship".
[47] Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, trans. Martin Ostwarld (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merril Company, 1962), 218.

excellence in virtue."[48] Perfect friendship was stable, as it was based on one's goodness, which, according to Aristotle, was enduring. It could be both useful and pleasant, but, just as in Cicero's definition, these were not the origins of perfect friendship. Aristotelian friendship was based on unanimity, hence Aristotle referred to the friend as one's second self. Particularly for Aristotle, fundamental to this likeness in mind was the equality of friends, not just in virtue and goodness, but also in wealth, power and status. Equality extended to all friendship, even those that are not perfect; it is an essential aspect of Aristotelian friendship.

Early Christian Friendship and the Augustinian Model

The Stoic notion of universal friendship was based on ideas of a community of friends and of equality between friends. These aspects of Stoic friendship made it particularly relevant and appealing to Christians. The Stoic model of friends holding all things in common was perfectly suited to the notion within early Christianity of the basic equality of all Christians before God. The first great Christian thinker who commented extensively on friendship was Augustine of Hippo (354–430). While Augustine acknowledged the classical ideal of friendship which he had sought to emulate in his youth, even adopting Cicero's definition of *amicitia*, he "at the same time develop[ed] a Christian theory of friendship and love in which faith, hope and charity are accorded their fullest value."[49] Augustine did not explicitly formulate his own theory, but friendship was a major subject of discussion in both the *Confessions* and the *City of God*. In the *Confessions*,

[48] Ibid., 219.
[49] James McEvoy, "Ultimate Goods: Happiness, Friendship, and Bliss," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Philosophy*, ed. A. S. McGrade (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 257.

Augustine described the friendships of his youth; some of those same friends entered into the Christian faith with him. He also recounted his early attempts to form a Stoic–style community with a group of friends; while this first attempt ultimately failed, he later resurrected this idea in founding a monastery. Furthermore, for Augustine, his *City of God* was "an ideal universal *societas amicalis*, or friendly society, where all are united by Christian charity."[50]

In *Confessions,* Augustine described the importance and role of friendship in his youth, and while he may have sought friendship out of worldly concerns, friendship was one of the goods he saw as granted to him by God even before his conversion:

> Yet, Lord, I must give thanks to you, the most excellent and supremely good Creator and Governor of the universe, my God, even though by your will I was merely a child. For at that time I existed, I lived and thought and took care for my self–preservation (a mark of your profound latent unity whence I derived my being). And inward instinct told me to take care of the integrity of my sense, and even in my little thoughts about little matters I took delight in the truth. I hated to be deceived, I developed a good memory, I acquired the armoury of being skilled with words, friendship softened me, I avoided pain, despondency, ignorance. In such a person what was not worthy of admiration and praise? But every one of these qualities are gifts of my God: I did not give them to myself.[51]

Augustine's "friends" were a constant presence in his work: as partners in sin, as distractions from a better life, but also as aids and supporters of his spiritual endeavors. When Augustine, after much inner anguish, finally accepted Christianity, Augustine was with his childhood friend Alypius. While the two were sitting together in a garden, in a state

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[50] Hyatte, *The Arts of Friendship: The Idealization of Friendship in Medieval and Early Renaissance Literature*, 47.
[51] Saint Augustine of Hippo, *The Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 69 (1:20).

of aggravation, he walked away from Alypius since, "solitude seemed to me more appropriate for the business of weeping." But he notes that Alypius "sensed that this was my condition at that moment" and let him go without question. This is the climactic conversion scene, in which Augustine was commanded to *tolle, lege*, "pick up and read." After reading but one passage – "Not in riots and drunken parties, not in eroticism and indecencies, not in strife and in rivalry, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provisions for the flesh in its lusts" (Rom. 13: 13–14) – Augustine no longer had any doubt to what he ought to do. And the first person he shared this revelation with was Alypius, who converted as well.[52]

Throughout his *Confessions*, Augustine sought to differentiate between normal or worldly friendship, which brought joy and pleasure but no spiritual benefits, and a particular type of perfect Christian friendship that elevated all parties towards God. Augustine, like other early Christian thinkers, displayed some discomfort with the language of *amicitia* and the idea of applying the term to fellowship among Christians. Part of this discomfort can be attributed to the requirement of virtue in friendship, which would seem to run counter to Christian modesty and humility. David Konstan, in his study of classical friendship, argues that the "protestations of unworthiness" found in the letters of early Christian authors are incompatible with traditional notions of Aristotelian and Ciceronian friendship.[53] It is not just Christian humility that is the issue, but also the necessity of equality among friends. C. Stephen Jaeger presents a far more "gloomy" (as he terms it)

[52] Ibid., 260 (8: 12).
[53] David Konstan, *Friendship in the Classical World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 159.

analysis of Augustine's view of friendship.[54] Jaeger argues that while Augustine certainly valued the friendships that he cultivated, they failed him at every turn. This was despite the fact that the model of friendship in which he framed his own close relationships was drawn from Aristotle, who viewed friendship as "mutual perfecting." Thus we can consider, for example, Augustine and his friend Alypius, who converted alongside him and eventually was named bishop of Tagaste (in what is now Algeria). While prior to their conversions Augustine and Alypius were for the most part virtuous men (albeit lacking in true faith) and much alike in character, each had his own failing – Alypius was addicted to watching violence and Augustine to sexual pleasure. Their "mutual perfecting" friendship was supposed to correct these faults. While it worked for a time, neither man was strong enough to overcome his desires, and so Alypius found himself dragged to the amphitheater by other friends and Augustine found himself plagued by the itch of lust.[55] Of course, the friendship did not itself fail, as the two remained friends and continued along the path towards conversion together. Rather, what failed was the promise of friendship, or at least that promise in the absence of faith. As Marsha L. Dutton concludes: "For Augustine friendship is fundamentally of the flesh rather than the spirit, something to take pleasure in for a time then to transcend. . . for him friendship is not to be enjoyed in itself but rather used for the enjoyment of God."[56]

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[54] C. Stephen Jaeger, "Friendship of Mutual Perfecting in Augustine's *Confessions* and the Failure of Classical *Amicitia*," in *Friendship in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age*, ed. Albrecht Classen and Marilyn Sandidge (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 2010), 185.
[55] For his discussion on Augustine and Alypius see Jaeger, 185–191.
[56] Marsha L. Dutton, "Friendship and the Love of God: Augustine's Teaching in the *Confessions* and Aelred of Rievaulx's Response in *Spiritual Friendship*," *American Benedictine Review* 56 (2005).

Elsewhere in *Confessions*, Augustine mourned the loss of a beloved friend who had died, and Augustine came to the realization that it was madness to love a mortal man so passionately, stating in his grief "I was in misery, and misery is the state of every soul overcome by friendship with mortal things and lacerated when they are lost." (4:6)[57] This understanding of the fleeting nature of earthly friendship was also echoed in *City of God*. According to Augustine, even if one was fortunate to recognize and achieve true friendship, he would be plagued with anxiety over the state of his friend's well being, and the more true friends one acquires the greater the anxiety. This anxiety was two–fold: "[f]or we are not only anxious lest they suffer from famine, war, disease, captivity, or the inconceivable horrors of slavery, but we are also affected with the much more painful dread that their friendship may be changed into perfidy, malice, and injustice." (19:8)[58] Both the loss of the friendship and the loss of the friend inevitably resulted in despair, but the only solution to this dilemma would have been to avoid friendship all together, something Augustine was clearly reluctant to do himself. Insisting on the failure and frailties of these human attachments, however, was not intended as an indictment of friendship, but rather an indictment of the human condition.

Augustine sought to put into practice the ideal of stoic Christian friendship through the founding of a community of like–minded individuals. Some of these individuals were friends whom he had known from boyhood – for example his friend Alypius. This first community soon fell apart, but despite this initial failure, Augustine did eventually found a monastery. The purpose of Augustine's community was clearly stated in his monastic rule:

[57] Augustine of Hippo, *The Confessions*, 125.
[58] *The City of God against the Pagans*, trans. R Dyson, W, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 929-30.

"The chief motivation for your sharing life together is to live harmoniously in the house [Ps. 67:7] and to have one heart and one soul seeking God [Acts 4:32a]."[59] In order to achieve this, the brothers were instructed to be humble regardless of their social class, to be obedient to those in superior positions, and to live a devout and disciplined life. As a community the brothers were to look out for each other: "Whenever you leave the house, go together; wherever you are going, stay together."[60] There were specific threats in the outside world that Augustine warned of: "Mutually safeguard your purity, when you are together in church and wherever women are present. God, who dwells in you, will protect you in this way too by your mutual vigilance. [2 Cor. 6:16]"[61] Women, of course, were not the only temptation to a monk: one's brothers were also called on to ensure that the individual monk was not tempted by fine food or fancy clothing. If the brother's warning did not suffice, he was called on to report to the superior, and he should not feel bad: "you are not without fault yourselves when you permit your brothers to perish because of your silence."[62] We might recall here that in *Confessions* friendship and good intentions on their own were unable to prevent Augustine and his best friend Alypius from regressing toward their sinful tendencies – a lust for women and a lust for violence; Augustine recognized human weakness despite friendship and good intentions, even among those striving for Christian perfection. An element that differentiated perfect Christian friendship from worldly friendship, for Augustine, was the obligation to speak up when a friend was in danger of going astray. But having experienced this very same challenge – the reluctance to

[59] George Lawless, *Augustine of Hippo and His Monastic Rule* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 81.
[60] Ibid., 87 - 89.
[61] Ibid., 91.
[62] Ibid., 91.

speak up – himself, Augustine in his rule sought to limit this possibility. Thus for example, while the brothers are to look out for one another, especially outside the walls of the monastery, "[w]hen someone has to leave the house, he ought to go with companions designated by the superior, not with persons of his own choosing,"[63] thus, presumably, ensuring that such necessary excursions were not more fraught with perils by being accompanied by brothers more inclined to look the other way, or encourage each other on, as Augustine's own friends did in his youth.

Augustine, in his rule, was not overtly concerned with preventing close friendships or intimate relationships between the monks; ensuring the harmony of the house was his greater worry. The whole of chapter six of the Rule was dedicated to the prevention of quarrels amongst the brothers, arising from insults or accusation, advising those at fault to seek pardon immediately so as not to let the situation get out of hand. Insults and accusations should not be confused with admonishing younger brothers:

> Even if you feel your criticism has been immoderate, you are not obliged to ask their pardon; too much attention to humility in their regard would undermine their ready acceptance of your authority. Instead, ask forgiveness from the Lord of all who knows how generously you love even those you may correct too harshly. Your love for one another ought to be spiritual, not carnal.[64]

On its own this final phrase would suggest that Augustine was concerned, as his later fellow rule–makers would be, about sexual intimacy among the brothers, but in the context of admonishing younger brothers, where it appears, it seems to specifically address relations between junior and senior monks, perhaps something Augustine observed as a potential, or

[63] Ibid., 97.
[64] Ibid., 99 - 101.

even a common, problem. However, beyond this one comment, the concept of friendship, intimate or platonic, as something disruptive or something beneficial to monastic life, was not much of a priority in Augustine's rule. Augustine, a man who clearly valued his own friendships, did not see such relationships as problematic to the community, as long as they worked to the support of individuals on the road to spiritual perfection.

Monastic Rules and the Dangers of Friendship

Augustine might have viewed friendship as problematic and imperfect, but he did not outright condemn it, nor even suggest that a good Christian should avoid it. Rather he implied that one should engage in friendship only with a realization of its limitations. Still it would take another eight centuries for there to develop a fully realized vision of Christian friendship, and that vision would eventually evolve in the monastic milieu. Within the early monastic tradition of medieval Europe, however, friendship presented certain challenges to daily life in the monastery and its communal ideals and was perceived as a potentially destabilizing element to monastic harmony. Indeed, an essential component of medieval monasticism was a denial of individualism; part of this denial included a rejection of personal relationships. Not only were monks and nuns required to renounce their worldly families but also many monastic institutions, both male and female, sought to prevent close relationships from forming within the cloister. Monasticism was founded on the notion of like–minded individuals creating communities, but individual friendships were seen as a threat to the order and equilibrium of the monastery. In her study of how early penitentials and monastic rules sought to control women's behavior, Julie Ann Smith explains that "[a]ll activities were communal yet isolating; the individual was never alone and yet private spirituality was the essence of the monastic experience" and thus monastic rule–makers,

and abbots and abbesses, attempted to prohibit personal friendships: "God was to be the only recipient of the individual's notice or love."[65] In contrast to the unpredictability of the secular world, the monastic community was a meticulously organized hierarchy in which close friendships between individuals could sometimes be seen as disruptive. On the other hand, the monastery represented one ideal of Christian friendship – a community of like–minded individuals coming together in the service of God.

About a century after Augustine of Hippo founded his community, the learned and intensely devout St. Benedict of Nursia (c.480–543) founded his monastery at Monte Cassino in Italy, not far from Rome. Benedict was a very different rule–maker than those who had preceded him; his lengthy Rule was meant to encompass almost every aspect of monastic life, from the qualities of office holders, to what the monks should eat and wear, to what they should do during every moment of the day and night. Benedict's Rule also incorporated a number of elements that became central to western European monasticism: Benedict insisted on stability, whereby the monks must remain in their initial community for life; he discouraged the life of a hermit; restricted movement outside the cloister; and, finally, stipulated that obedience was due first to the rule and second to the superiors.[66]

When it came to monitoring the monks' interactions, Benedict's main concern was regulating conversation between the brothers; he returned again and again to the topic throughout his Rule. Restraint in talking is listed as one of Benedict's tools of good works: "Close your mouth on evil and perverse talk. Do not get in the habit of long–winded

[65] Julie Ann Smith, *Ordering Women's Lives: Penitentials and Nunnery Rules in the Early Medieval West* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 113.
[66] Ibid., 120 - 21.

conversations. Do not engage in empty babbling or joking. Don't indulge in prolonged or explosive laughter."[67] In four other chapters Benedict made reference to this kind of communication: prohibiting "crude jokes and idle talk"; listing speaking without laughter as the eleventh step to humility; insisting that speaking after Compline was especially prohibited, except in the case of guests or if the abbot had to give a quick order; and, finally, warning the abbot to oversee closely the monks while at work and at reading, during which he ought to "be on the lookout for the bored brother who gives himself over to frivolity or gossip."[68] For Benedict, the heart of monasticism was the community, hence his distrust of monks who traveled from monastery to monastery, or ventured off on their own to be hermits. His restrictions on speaking – and his insistence that silence was integral to the monastic vow – were meant to preserve the integrity of the community, both spiritually and practically. Each brother needed to fulfill his spiritual and earthly obligations: if one or two were mindlessly chatting they were not doing their part, and so were disrupting the entire order of the community. The fall of one brother, regardless of how small the sin, meant the fall of the community as a whole.

Considering that for Benedict a unified and orderly community was paramount, it would make sense in this context that individual relationships between monks would have been frowned upon. The Rule, however, does not explicitly prohibit friendships. Instead, stipulations such as restricting conversation and insisting that the monks abide by a strict hierarchy in effect limited the opportunity for friendships to develop. One rule does specifically address the potential "problem" of friendship: in the 69th chapter, Benedict

[67] Benedict of Nursia, *Benedict's Rule: A Translation and Commentary*, trans. Terrence G. Kardong (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1981), 81.
[68] Ibid., 119, 34, 344 and 83.

prohibited one monk from sticking up for another:

> Be especially careful that no monk presume on any occasion to defend another monk in the monastery or take him under his protection, as it were. This is so, even if they are joined by some degree of family relationship. In no way should monks presume to behave this way, for it can cause the most serious conflict to arise. If anyone violates this principle, he should be severely punished.[69]

Such an action would severely jeopardize the harmony and balance of the monastery that depended on a denial both of the individual and of any bonds that had existed outside the monastery, for the sake of the community. The original Latin translated by Kardong as "most serious conflict" could also be translated as "most serious occasion of scandal" and thus suggesting that Benedict was not solely concerned about the disruption to the community, but also about factionalism among the monks, and the potential of brothers being accused, perhaps, of a more intimate relationship.[70] Yet overall, the rule did not directly allude to the potential of sexual relationships; while Benedict required that each monk have a separate bed and that the beds of younger brothers be interspersed among those of elders, he remains silent as to the reason, but considering his concern over the dangers of speaking, conversation and gossip was likely at the forefront of Benedict's mind.[71]

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[69] Ibid., 573.
[70] The Latin reads for the entire phrase reads *Nec quolibet modo id a monachis praesumatur, quia exinde gravissima occasio scandalorum oriri potest.*
[71] Nursia, *Benedict's Rule: A Translation and Commentary*, 22. Other rule makers were evidently much more concerned with sexual intimacy among monks. St. Pachomius (d. 348), a desert father and early proponent of cenobitic monasticism, was more direct in his monastic rule, in which he stipulated that two monks could not ride one behind the other on a donkey or wagon–shaft! See Armand Veilleux, trans., *Pachomian Koinonia: Volume Two* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications Inc, 1981), 162.

Spiritual Friendship and the Cistercian Ideal

Despite the influence of Benedict on the monastic tradition in Europe, not all monks or monastic orders were equally suspicious of personal friendship. An alternate model of friendship was spiritual friendship, a Christian derivative of classical notions of educative love, through which a student was directed and guided by a master. This model of friendship was most fully articulated in the twelfth century, and while here I will focus specifically on a monastic vision of friendship, this development occurred in the context of the twelfth–century Renaissance, during which human bonds of friendship and love were common throughout the entirety of the literate culture that was developing.[72] The medieval treatise on friendship that has received the most attention from modern scholars is Aelred of Rievaulx's *On Spiritual Friendship*.[73] Aelred (1109 – 1166) was an English Cistercian monk, who became abbot of Rievaulx around 1147. His text is divided into three books. The first was written soon after he became abbot, sometime between 1147 and 1157, while the second and third books were written during the last ten years of his life.[74] In the text, Aelred, as abbot, was approached by some of his young monks for council on friendship. Aelred identified three different kinds of friendship: carnal, worldly, and spiritual. According to Aelred, "carnal friendship is created by an agreement in vices, while hope of gain spurs on worldly friendship, and habits in life makes for a bond of friendship among

[72] Julian Haseldine, "Monastic Friendship in Theory and in Action in the Twelfth Century," in *Friendship in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age*, ed. Albrecht Classen and Marilyn Sandidge (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 2010).
[73] For an English translation see Aelred of Rievaulx, *Aelred of Rievaulx's Spiritual Friendship*, trans. Mark F. Williams (Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 1994).
[74] For a background on Aelred's life and works, see the introduction by Mark Williams in *Aelred of Rievaulx's Spiritual Friendship*, 9 – 23.

good people."[75] Although worldly friendship was flawed, Aelred asserted that it could lead to spiritual friendship, which was necessary for true happiness and a way in which to know God: "for friendship is a path that leads very close to the perfection which consists of the enjoyment and knowledge of God, such that a man who is a friend of man is made into a friend of God, according to what the Savior said in the gospel: 'Now I will not call you servants, but my friends' [John 15:15]."[76]

Aelred identified Cicero as his classical source for theories of *amicitia*, stating in the prologue to the text:

> Then, after some time, I acquired Cicero's famous book on friendship, and at once it seemed to me both useful in its weighty thoughts and pleasant in its agreeable eloquence . . .And although this book did not allow me to see myself as capable of the kind of friendship it described, I was still glad to have found a kind of principle for friendship, according to which I would be able to control my wandering loves and attachments.[77]

However, for Aelred, perfect virtue as a precondition to friendship made it unattainable within a Christian worldview, and so, to create a useable model of Christian friendship, Aelred significantly altered the Ciceronian concept of perfect friendship. Thus, in Aelred's model of spiritual friendship, goodness in intentions was the basis on which the relationship ought to be built rather than the perfect goodness of those involved in the relationship. When one of the young monks in *On Spiritual Friendship* asked what friendship has to do with him and his companions, since they are not truly "good," the character Aelred responded:

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[75] Aelred of Rievaulx, *Aelred of Rievaulx's Spiritual Friendship*, 35.
[76] Ibid., 44.
[77] Ibid., 27.

> I do not define the "good" so closely . . . like those who maintain that no one is good except that person who lacks nothing in perfection. We say that a good person is the one who, according to the way of our mortal flesh, lives "soberly and justly and piously in this life," [Titus 2:12] and desires to seek nothing dishonourable from anyone at all, nor to perform a dishonourable deed when asked. Indeed, we do not doubt that among such people friendship arises, by such people it is preserved, and in such people it is perfected.[78]

Whereas in philosophical models, one's natural goodness was a pre–condition to friendship and friendship could only be as perfect its participants, in spiritual friendship, the relationship provided a path to perfection. Still, in Aelred's model of spiritual friendship, even if perfection was not required, a certain moral direction was.

Concerns of Friendship in the Convent

The rules of both Augustine and, especially, Benedict were often used as–is by women's monastic communities throughout the Middle Ages. To make his rule woman–friendly, in response to a request by a community of nuns at Hippo, Augustine only changed the grammatical gender of the pronouns; according to Smith, this indicates "that there was little which Augustine perceived that men could achieve in spiritual terms which were not also within the physical and spiritual capacities of women."[79] Perhaps the limited scope of St. Augustine's Rule can account for this, as Benedict's Rule, while used by many women's communities, was not always considered appropriate. Smith suggests that Benedict was not particularly attuned to the interest among women in monastic life. Unlike earlier, Eastern rule–makers such as Basil and Pachomius, who composed rules for their

[78] Ibid., 50.
[79] Smith, *Ordering Women's Lives: Penitentials and Nunnery Rules in the Early Medieval West*, 117.

monastically–minded sisters, Benedict did not write a rule for his sister Scholastica, even though she established a community quite near Monte Cassino.[80] Considering the detail included in the Rule Benedict composed for his monks, one wonders if he *had* composed a Rule for Scholastica, how different it might be. Indeed, many monastic women found his Rule to be unsatisfactory.[81]

Some communities of nuns insisted on their own rules. Most of these rules date from the early Middle Ages, perhaps a reflection of a period in which the norms of monastic life were still developing. Monastic rules for women of the sixth and seventh centuries were often composed by Christian leaders for local convents.[82] Two of these early rule makers were Walderbert of Luxeuil (sixth century) and Donatus of Besançon (seventh century). While it is not completely certain that he was the writer of the rule attributed to him, Walderbert was known for recruiting Frankish noblewoman into monastic life. More is known about Donatus, who composed a rule heavily based on those of Columbanus, Benedict, and Caesarius of Arles for the convent founded by his mother Flavia. The preoccupation of these rule–makers, much like Benedict, was the running of the monastery – for example, the necessary qualities of holders of major monastic offices like abbess, gatekeeper, and cellarer; daily routines; accepting novices; and discipline. But within this framework these rule–makers sought to maintain monastic harmony and avoid disruptive behavior through providing guidelines for right relations, in a similar fashion to Benedict.

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[80] Ibid., 121.
[81] Ibid., 121 - 22.
[82] For a brief historical overview of these early rule–makers and communities as well as a survey of the rules, see Section II of Smith, *Ordering Women's Lives.* Also Jo Ann McNamara, *The Ordeal of Community*, (Toronto: Peregrina, 1993) and Jo Ann McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).

Like their predecessors, both Walderbert and Donatus were concerned with maintaining basic harmony within the community. For Walderbert, this meant that all sisters should love each other, "so that they may save one another" although that love must be a certain kind of love: "if a sister loves a sister because of Christ she will not drive Christ from her for the sake of temporal [earthly] love."[83] Here, Walderbert seems to be invoking the concept of Christian *caritas,* to love God as much as one's neighbor and oneself. Donatus, on the other hand, encouraged the sisters not to "despise" one another or look down on a sister who had come from humbler beginnings; nor should they sisters quarrel or "hurl insults" at each other.[84] Encouraging love or preventing quarrels was only part of the strategy; at the same time, both Walderbert and Donatus sought to discourage particular relationships. Likely borrowing from Benedict, both rule–makers included rules against defending other sisters: Walderbert admonished nuns who defended a neighbor or relative, stating that it was a selfish act, while Donatus, borrowing from Benedict, specifically prohibited this sort of action "because it would give occasion for scandal."[85] As in the original, we are left to wonder about the exact nature of this "scandal," particularly because the Latin *scandalum* can imply our modern understanding of the term, but also in an ecclesiastical sense a challenge or stumbling block, or some sort of sinful offence. But we can surmise, based on his other dictates discussed below which are more explicit, that Donatus was at least concerned with sisters developing such close relationships that others would *perceive* them as sexual, as well as the potential of cliques and favoritism among the

[83] Walderbert, "The Rule of a Certain Father to Virgins," trans. Jo Ann McNamara and John E. Halborg, *The Ordeal of Community* (Toronto: Peregrina, 1993), http://monasticmatrix.osu.edu/node/51500.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Walderbert, "The Rule of a Certain Father to Virgins," and Donatus of Besançon, "The Rule of Donatus of Besançon," *The Ordeal of Community.*

nuns.

A common theme in the rules of Walderbert and Donatus was a concern about speech. While all monastic rules advocated silence, these rule–makers' fears appears to have centered, specifically on the danger of useless chatter or gossip – something that was a concern among monks as well – rather than the threats to the maintenance of appropriate silence. While meals were normally to be silent affairs, Walderbert, perhaps feeling generous, allowed the sisters to speak at the table on certain special occasions – Easter, Christmas, Epiphany and Pentecost – "so long as they speak tersely not in a babbling voice. . . [and] let this conversation be such that it gives profit not loss to the soul from consideration of Scripture."[86] Perhaps borrowing from Benedict again, Donatus was even more concerned with the sisters' speaking with one another. He listed not speaking and not laughing as the ninth and tenth grades of humility, respectively and prohibited "gossiping" in the oratory.[87] Furthermore, in Rule 28 he specifically chastises her "who passes along idle gossip and excuses herself and speaks counsel against counsel."[88]

Augustine's warning about avoiding carnal love, discussed above, seems to have been a bit of an after–thought, and Benedict did not broach the topic at all, but Walderbert and Donatus were much more direct about prohibiting exclusive relations and taking action to prevent the possibility of falling into lustful sin.[89] Donatus, in particular, stipulated in his rule that:

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[86] Walderbert, "The Rule of a Certain Father to Virgins."
[87] Donatus of Besançon, "The Rule of Donatus of Besançon," ibid.
[88] Jo Ann McNamara, *The Ordeal of Community* (Toronto: Peregrina, 1993).
[89] Smith also discusses how early rules sought to prevent sexual relationship. See Smith, *Ordering Women's Lives: Penitentials and Nunnery Rules in the Early Medieval West*, 191 - 93.

> It is forbidden that any take the hand of another for affection whether they stand or walk around or sit together. She who does so, will be improved with twelve blows. And any who is called "little girl" or who call one another "little girl," forty blows if they so transgress.[90]

Was this a particular problem that Donatus observed amongst the sisters? What kind of term of endearment was "little girl" that it warranted such harsh punishment? These are questions that cannot be answered, but what this stipulation shows is that relationships between individual nuns were perceived as a threat to the community, regardless of the nature of that relationship. Both rule–makers insisted that the community take care when it came to sleeping arrangements. Donatus, despite being so specific about holding hands and such, here merely advised that each sister should have her own bed, and sleep fully clothed, "their girdles bound with all gravity and modesty and always ready for divine service."[91] Walderbert is more extensive and concrete when it came to his concerns; he stipulated two sisters to a bed (perhaps the community he was writing for was larger or poorer than that of Donatus?), but they should not talk, for "[t]hus the ancient enemy who desires to wound souls through a cheerful mouth cannot let fly, hurling some fraud that might excite mortal desires through conversation."[92] His concern behind this stipulation could have merely been idle gossip or the formation of close – and perhaps sexual – relationships. Walderbert was more explicit, however, when he warned against young girls sharing a bed "lest in some adversity of the flesh their warmth carries them off into sin."[93]

Of course Benedict, a major source for both Donatus and Walderbert, was also

[90] Besançon, "The Rule of Donatus of Besançon."
[91] Ibid.
[92] Walderbert, "The Rule of a Certain Father to Virgins."
[93] Walderbert, "The Rule of a Certain Father to Virgins."

concerned about his monks speaking with one another, as discussed above, and he even used the word gossip (*fabulare*) to describe the type of talk he found to be dangerous. However, in the context of Benedict's conception of community, the threat of improper conversation was that such talk could detract from the individual brother's sense of role within the community as whole. Walderbert, on the other hand, suggested that bed–time chatter was a "gate–way" behavior to other sins. Historically, women's speech has often been perceived as dangerous in this way; Karma Lochrie has demonstrated how women with "loose" tongues were perceived as loose in other ways, and that women talking with other women was thought to often lead to women *desiring* women.[94] Walderbert can certainly be seen as fitting into this tradition of thought, and while Donatus did not overtly express such a fear, both rule–makers appear to have been more concerned about intimate relationships within the cloister than Benedict was. Even where the rules are quite similar, the motivations behind certain regulations appear to be different, for while Benedict was concerned with individual relationships breaking down the community of the monastery, for Walderbert and Donatus the possibility of carnal sins between the nuns seems to have been the graver threat.

If rules composed specifically for women's monastic communities were rare, those that were created by women – or at least have some evident female input – were rarer still. Even a brief look at two such rules – the rule composed by Peter Abelard for Heloise's

[94] Karma Lochrie, "Between Women," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, ed. Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 78 - 79. Much of the scholarship on women's talk and gossip has derived from medieval English literature. See also Karma Lochrie, *Covert Operations: The Medieval Uses of Secrecy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999) and Susan E. Phillips, *Transforming Talk: The Problem with Gossip in Late Medieval England* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007).

order of the Paraclete, and the rule composed by Clare of Assisi for the order of Franciscan women religious she founded in 1212 at San Damiano, Assisi – illuminate the different concerns that men and women had about monastic life in general, and about interactions between fellow nuns in particular.

Abelard (1079–1142) and Heloise (d. 1164) might be medieval Europe's most famous couple, and their unfortunate story, recounted through their letters, is well known, allowing us rare access into the lives of two twelfth–century individuals.[95] In order to protect her from the fury of her uncle, who had discovered the affair, Abelard placed Heloise in the convent of Argenteuil but after his castration he installed her as abbess along with some of the Argenteuil nuns at Paraclete.[96] The nuns of the Paraclete followed the Rule of St. Benedict as they had done at Argenteuil, but Heloise found the rule inappropriate for a community of women in a number of ways, and asked Abelard to create for them a new rule.[97] Many of Heloise's issues with St. Benedict's Rule concerned women's

[95] The scholarship on Abelard and Heloise is extensive. For the most used translation see Betty Radice and Michael Clanchy, *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise* (London: Penguin Books, 2004). The best source on the life of Abelard is Michael Clanchy, *Abelard: A Medieval Life* (London: Blackwell Publishers, 1999). For a recent biography of the couple see Constant J. Mews, *Abelard and Heloise* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[96] The Oratory of the Paraclete was originally a Benedictine monastery founded by Abelard in 1121 near Troye, as a small learning community of monks, but found the monks to be "not only idle and dissolute but murderous in intent when he tried to reform them." Radice and Clanchy, *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, 21. He turned it over to Heloise in 1125, after he was elected abbot by the monks of the Abbey at Saint–Gildas–de–Rhuys. Abelard was buried at the Paraclete upon his death in 1142. For a brief history of the Paraclete in Heloise's time see Chrysogonus Waddell, "Heloise and the Abbey of the Paraclete," in *The Making of Christian Communities in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, ed. Mark Williams (London: Anthem Press, 2005).

[97] This exchange comes from three letters known as the letter of direction. For Heloise's request see letter 5 and for Abelard's rule see letter 7 of Radice and Clanchy, *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*. Because the sisters had already pledged obedience to the rule of St.

particular needs. For example, the very first problem she brought up in her letter to Abelard was the Rule's prohibition against undergarments, which she found problematic for women due to menarche. She also contended that nuns were unable to do all the physical labor Benedict's Rule required because as women they were simply physically weaker than monks. For our subject here, however, Heloise's concern about the hosting of visitors is particularly compelling. Benedict's Rule stipulated that the abbot should sit at a separate table from the brother to dine with any guests or pilgrims, and so Heloise asked:

> Which is more fitting for our religious life: for an abbess never to offer hospitality to men, or for her to eat with men she has allowed in? It is all too easy for the souls of men and women to be destroyed if they live together in one place, and especially at table, where gluttony and drunkenness are rife, and wine which leads to lechery is drunk with enjoyment.[98]

But it is not just male guests that concerned Heloise. After quoting from Ovid's *Art of Love* on the tendency of banquets to lead to fornication, she notes that women, too, presented a threat to the sisters' virtue: "Surely nothing is so conducive to a woman's seduction as woman's flattery, nor does a woman pass on the foulness of a corrupted mind so readily to any but another woman; which is why St. Jerome particularly exhorts women of a sacred calling to avoid contact with women of the world."[99] For Heloise, it was not relationships between the nuns that worried her, but the nuns being drawn into thinking about more earthly concerns – beauty, perhaps, or gossip – or tempted into intimate relationships with non–religious visitors, particularly other women. Here, as in a number of early Rules, the

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Benedict in legal terms, based on the 2nd Lateran Council of 1139, they could not simply take up a new rule. Likely Abelard's rule was used in conjunction to Benedict's.

[98] Ibid., 160.

[99] Ibid., 161. Karma Lochrie has commented on this passage. See Lochrie, "Between Women."

fear could be about sexual activity as much as a general temptation of the nuns to more worldly pleasures. In the rule that Abelard provided for the Paraclete, he prohibited male guests from entering the convent and advised that the abbess should dine with the sisters and have a steward dine with the guests. His rationale behind this was that the abbess could best supervise her flock if she dined with them.[100] He did not, however – as far as we know – speak to her concern about the dangers that the visiting women brought with them. Surely if an abbess could be susceptible to temptation, then so could her steward, although since he was presumably not bound by a vow of chastity, it was of far less concern.

The rules examined thus far were all composed by men, often for the communities of women they helped establish, although Abelard's rule was a response to Heloise's request and the abbess had a number of specific concerns to which he responded. In this regard Clare of Assisi (1194–1253) was an exception; she rejected three rules written for her community by men and eventually took on the task herself. Described as "the most dedicated follower of the Poor Man of Assisi" by Regis J. Armstrong, Clare rejected marriage and sought a life of poverty, inspired by the preaching of Francis of Assisi (c. 1181–1226).[101] Francis placed her in a tiny church, and she soon gathered about her a community of women. Francis himself provided Clare with "a way of life" which is no longer extant, except for a few phrases that she included in her own Rule.[102] Another Rule was composed

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[100] Radice and Clanchy, *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, 208.
[101] Regis J. Armstrong and Ignatius C. Brady, *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 169.
[102] As this "way of life" is no longer extant, it is unclear if this was a rule in the more traditional sense, perhaps a version of the rule he composed for the friars, or something less formal. It might also have been a half–hearted attempt. Katherine French has argued that despite the close friendship between Francis and Clare, Francis was not interested in "institutionalizing" his relationship with her, or in building a network of female

for the sisters by Cardinal Hugolino while he was acting as their protector in 1218/1219 and then a third rule was given to the community by Pope Innocent IV in 1247.[103] Cardinal Hugolino composed a rule for the Poor Ladies of San Damiano to be used in addition to the Rule of St. Benedict. As Papal Legate to Tuscany and Lombardy, Hugolino sought to address a common situation of women's religious communities in the region – the lack of consistent spiritual and administrative oversight of these communities due to the itinerant inclinations of the mendicants – and his *Form and Manner of Life* was concerned primarily with how the sisters could guarantee spiritual stability, as well as establishing policies that would ensure the strict cloistering of the Poor Ladies.[104] The Rule provided by Innocent IV removed the Rule of Benedict, replacing it with Francis' *Regula Bullata* and the now–lost "way of life" he had composed for Clare.[105] But none of these rules satisfied Clare as they were missing two components she deemed fundamental: radical poverty and dependence on the Order of the Friars Minor. So she wrote her own, which was approved by papal bull two days before Clare's death. Clare was the first woman to write her own religious Rule.[106]

Clare used the Rule of Francis as the basis of her own Rule, and thus it is worth briefly

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communities. French, "Religion and Popular Beliefs: Choices, Constraints, and Creativity for Christian Women," 71.

[103] However, in 1250, a papal bull was issued dictating that no sister should be compelled to follow his rule.

[104] The original of that document that Cardinal Hugolino composed for Clare sometime after August 1218 is not longer extant, however a slightly later edition was sent to a newly founded monastery in Pamplona by Cardinal Hugolino, now Pope Gregory IX, in 1228. It was intended as a supplement to St Benedict's Rule. Regis J. Armstrong, *The Lady: Clare of Assisi: Early Documents* (New York: New City Press, 2006), 73-85.

[105] Leslie S. Knox, *Creating Clare of Assisi: Female Franciscan Identities in Later Medieval Italy* (Leiden: Brill, 2008). Original texts and English translations of many of the documents relating to Saints Francis and Clare can be found online at: "Frances and Clare of Assisi: Early Documents," Saint Louis University, http://franciscantradition.org:8080/FAED/toc.jsp.

[106] Armstrong, *The Lady: Clare of Assisi: Early Documents*, 106.

examining Francis' Rule. Francis went through a few drafts before composing the Rule that would eventually be approved by the Papacy, the *Regula Bullata*; this and an earlier Rule are extant. The early Rule included prohibitions against the brothers quarrelling with one another: "let them not murmur nor detract from others for it is written: Gossips and detractor are detestable to God (Rm 1:29, 30)," but this chapter was not included in the *Regula Bullata*.[107] Other than this, however, Francis was not as concerned as his rule-making predecessors with how the friars behaved toward one another and he included no directives on such common concerns as sleeping arrangements and silence, reflecting the itinerant nature and lack of structure in the friars' lifestyle. In her Rule, Clare also did not address sleeping arrangements of the women religious, but she did include a lengthy chapter on silence and speaking. Chapter V included all the usual regulations – no speaking in the dormitories, during meals, or in church – but conversation was permitted in the infirmary "for the recreation and service of those who are sick," suggesting a concern with keeping up the spirits of the ill as well as their bodies.[108] While she might have been somewhat lenient in the infirmary, Chapter V also included detailed rules about communications with the outside world. Speaking with outsiders was permitted in the parlor – a room set aside specifically for meeting visitors – and at the grille – a fence of sorts that separated the sisters from the rest of the congregation in church, through which they heard the Mass and received communion. The grille was to have a locked gate and a curtain. Any conversations the sister had with outsiders were only allowed by permission of the Abbess or Vicar *and* only if they took place in the presence of others – two sisters in

[107] Armstrong and Brady, *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works*, 119.
[108] Ibid., 217. No such considerations were granted by St. Benedict, who is more concerned that the sick brother not be too demanding of his caretakers!

the parlor, and three at the grille – who were appointed by the Abbess or Vicar.[109] From the rule, we cannot tell with whom the sisters might have been speaking, either in the parlor or at the grille, although we might surmise that an additional guardian was required at the grille because it would have been easier to have illicit conversations in the public space of the presumably noisier church than in a room within the convent walls. This chapter distinguishes Clare's Rule from that of her mentor Francis, but also from the rules of the early female communities, which included no such stipulations, suggesting that in the latter case there was no easy opportunity for conversing with outsiders unless one snuck over the walls.[110] While the Poor Ladies may have been enclosed, their enclosure was more permeable than that of traditional female orders. Part of this may be attributed to St. Francis's placing of St. Clare in a rebuilt church in an urban environment rather than in a newly–built, secluded, convent. While Clare may have been concerned about her nuns conversing with people from outside the walls, she seems not to have worried about relationships forming among her nuns. In neither the Rules of Francis or of Clare do we find the concern that we see in the older Rules of traditional monastic orders that friendship or any individual relationships posed a threat to the community. In the case of the Franciscans, this perhaps can be attributed to the lifestyle of the mendicants, which eschewed the separation of the brothers from the secular world; the community was no longer the focus of the monastic ideal as it was for Benedict. Clare's nuns may have been enclosed, but their greater access to lay society as compared with their more traditional sisters and, more importantly, the emphasis on extreme poverty, meant that for the

[109] Ibid.
[110] Some early rules do include references to gifts received from friends or family, or parental visits.

mendicant women, like the friars, community was neither the source nor the goal for spirituality.

Expanding and Gendering the Discourse

For classical philosophers and many Christian thinkers, *amicitia* was seen as a good thing. Not only was friendship a natural outcome of the coming together of like–minded and virtuous individuals, it was a path to self–fulfillment and true happiness. But it was precisely these classical overtones of virtue and goodness in friendship that made it difficult for medieval writers to apply it to women's relationships. Three aspects of womanhood barred women from participating in *amicitia*: their intrinsic lack of virtue, the dangers inherent in female fellowship, and their role and status in society. This is not to say that women in medieval Europe lacked "friends" or did not enter in to relationships of support or companionship with other women. Rather, women's extra–familial emotional bonds could not be categorized – from the medieval philosophical perspective – as *amicitia*.

The philosophical models of friendship as found in Cicero and Aristotle were considered inapplicable to women because of women's inherent qualities and social functions. Anna Roberts argues that it was the idea of friendship motivated by intrinsic goodness of good men that denied to women the possibility of real friendship.[111] Ultimately, from the perspective of philosophers and theologians alike, woman's characteristics such as her instability, her softness, and her natural inferiority, made her ill–equipped for *amicitia,* which required a degree of virtue and worth that women were

[111] Anna Roberts, "Helpful Widows, Virgins in Distress: Women's Friendship in French Romance of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries," in *Constructions of Widowhood and Virginity in the Middle Ages*, ed. Cindy L. Carlson and Angela Jane Weisl (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 32.

deemed to lack. In order to comprehend why female fellowship could not be equated with such a lofty ideal as *amicitia* it is necessary to consider what it meant to be female from the perspective of medieval thinkers.

By and large, our understanding of the medieval assumptions regarding women comes from the works of men who had little day–to–day experience with the opposite sex. Their intended audience was others like themselves – men who spent their days behind the walls of a monastery, in the lecture halls of a university, or at church altars, although the last of these – the secular clergy – could at least be said to have regular interactions with members of the opposite sex. Yet their understanding of women permeated medieval culture, and can be traced through the popular literature of medieval courts and towns, and in guides to comportment and behavior of the later medieval period. The medieval construction of femininity was based on a combination of clerical bias, institutionalized patriarchy, and physiological assumptions drawn from natural philosophy and the classical tradition. Seemingly contradictory models of the feminine found in the Bible – the temptress Eve, the Virgin Mary – simply demonstrated the inconstancy of a woman's character, and the notion of the slippery nature of women was only enhanced and reinforced by classical theories of medicine and natural philosophy.[112]

Female physiology was thought to underlie women's flaws; thus for example a woman's menses as well as her inconsistency were rooted in her physiology. Classical

[112] There is an abundance of literature on medieval misogyny. For some general studies of the topic see: Kim M. Phillips, "Introduction: Medieval Meanings of Women" in *A Cultural History of Women in the Middle Ages*, vol. 2, ed. Kim M. Phillips (London: Bloomsberry, 2013; Alcuin Blamires, *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); and R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

medical theories based on the works of Galen held that men and women were in opposition to each other. Thus, for example, men's bodies were hard, while women's were soft. These physical differences echoed other differences, so that women were not just physically soft, but more able to be molded by others and changeable in their thoughts and opinions. Men, on the other hand, were naturally more inclined to be stable mentally as well as physically.[113] Fundamental to classical notions of friendship was stability, so if women were naturally more fickle, they would not make good friends.

Perhaps more detrimental to the concept of women was Aristotle, who thought of woman as an imperfect male, brought about by some flaw at the time of conception. This natural imperfection was, for Aristotle and his followers, the reason why women were subordinate to men. Perfect friendship, according to Aristotle, was a virtuous activity, and required virtuous actors. In this model of friendship women simply lacked the necessary virtue to obtain friendship.[114] In the context of medieval Europe, women, just as men, could be virtuous, but they exhibited different kinds of virtue. A virtuous man might act courageously and justly; he might excel in intellect and reason; he might have full command over himself and his subordinates. A woman, on the other hand, displayed her virtue in her ability to obey and fulfill her roles as wife and mother dutifully.[115] This sort of submissive

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[113] Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Differences in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
[114] Since Aristotle is actually mum on the subject, it is not clear if he would grant that women might become friends for the purpose of pleasure or utility. One could easily presume he never gave the matter much thought.
[115] Carla Casagrande, "The Protected Woman," in *A History of Women in the West: Silences of the Middle Ages*, ed. Christine Klapisch-Zuber (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 89.

virtue was simply incompatible with a relationship that was entered into voluntarily by equally virtuous men.

A further impediment to the possibility of women engaging in perfect friendship was the limited roles medieval society officially granted to them. According to Karma Lochrie, the social categories that defined women in the Middle Ages – virgin, wife, widow – rendered "relationships between women a meaningless or even illegible aspect of femininity," as these social categories limited women's identities to their familial and sexual role.[116] A fourth category – the lustful or sinful woman – also existed, but if virtue was a prerequisite for *amicitia*, then a perfect friend could not be filled with lust or tainted with sin. A chaste and virtuous woman fell into one of the first three above categories, but such categories restricted women to the home, under the dominance of a male relative, for even a virtuous widow needed the protection of her family to remain as such.

Karma Lochrie further posits that the "official" – and patriarchal – perception of female fellowship was that no good could conceivably come of it. At the root of this perception was concern over the grave danger of communication between women: that is, gossip, a failing to which women were particularly susceptible. Idle talk between women was a particular concern due to the presumption that when women talked to one another, the conversation would inevitably turn towards sex. This "unbridled" sex talk between women was "inextricably bound up with their unrestrained licentiousness." Furthermore, women's speech constituted a site of resistance to male dominance. Since female relationships were by their very nature both sullied and dangerous, they could not possibly

[116] Lochrie, "Between Women," 70.

constitute a form of *amicitia*.[117] Thus, it was not necessary for a thirteenth–century commentator on Aristotle to explicitly exclude the feminine sex from *amicitia*: women were automatically absent from such a discussion on account of their inherent lack of virtue, their limited role in medieval society, and the negative connotations of female fellowship. The possibility of female *amicitia* – as understood through philosophical models – was simply nonsensical.

Anna Roberts, who has examined female friendship in French romances, argues that while women were excluded from the philosophical ideology of *amicitia*, there was an alternate model of friendship for women, one based not on indifference between individuals of equal valor, but based on one woman's need of assistance from another.[118] Roberts argues that widowhood (and to a lesser extent virginity) constituted a period during a woman's life in which she was vulnerable but at the same time autonomous. As a widow, particularly if she was elderly, a woman was outside the sexual–economic exchange. Roberts refers to those widows, who were not likely to remarry, as non–circulating women. Other women – wives whose husbands were absent or virgins on the run – can be said to have had a similar social status to widows. Roberts suggests the term "social widowhood" for these women, who had to turn to other networks of support – other widows or "social widows" – when in need. According to Roberts, "women's networks are presented in the romance in an array of configurations, prominently featuring such motivations as proper aristocratic behavior (charity), proper women's behavior (gender

[117] Ibid., 73.
[118] Roberts, "Helpful Widows, Virgins in Distress: Women's Friendship in French Romance of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries."

solidarity), and exchange of money or skills for shelter."[119] Within this framework, Roberts examines the trope of the virgin seeking the support of a widow in the French romances as a representation of female friendship. Roberts argues that women were denied the possibility of friendship as constructed in theoretical models on the basis of women's intrinsic lack of virtue, and therefore it is necessary to find specifically feminine models of friendship. She concludes that the relationships between widows and hapless virgins suggests an alternative model of *amicitia* for women.

The friendship between the wise widow and the hapless virgin lacked that aspect of equality that seemed so fundamental in philosophical constructions of friendships. But, as the weaker sex with limited resources and power in general, women were not necessarily constrained by that lack of equality in status when it came to finding friends. An unusual example of female friendship can be found in Chaucer's *The Squire's Tale*, in which a relationship between Princess Canacee and a female falcon is a subplot of the Squire's (unfinished) story. The female falcon, weak with despair, fell from a tree after she realized that her falcon lover had taken up with a kite (a bird of lesser status) and abandoned her. Canacee, who thanks to a magical ring was able to communicate with any living thing, nursed the falcon back to health. According to Sara Deutch Schotland, in her analysis of the friendship between the Princess and the bird, the lack of equality made a friendship between two women (or at least two female beings) a possibility. Schotland argues, "female friendship is more acceptable or at least more common when there is a gap in status."[120] In

[119] Ibid., 44.
[120] Sara Deutch Schotland, "Talking Birth and Gentle Heart: Female Homosocial Bonding in the Squire's Tale," in *Friendship in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age*, ed. Albrecht Classen and Marilyn Sandidge (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2010).

this depiction of female friendship, not only were the two participants not of equal status (a woman who is also a princess and a bird – a noble bird, but still a bird) but also their friendship was born out of the help one needs from the other. In this way, too, this friendship was substantially different from those found in the works of Aristotle, Cicero, or Augustine. On the other hand, the relationship between Canacee and the falcon more closely resembles those between widows and virgins described by Anna Roberts. It is possible to draw comparisons between this model of friendship – the purpose of which is for the wiser or more capable woman to help and support a younger or more helpless female – and Aelred's vision of spiritual friendship. After all, both models were based on the need for aid and assistance. But while spiritual friendship was formed in support of pursuing a greater goal, the impetus for these female friendships was protection in the face of a dangerous world; dangers perpetrated by men. This, too, was why friendships of unequal status were possible among women; females, regardless of species or class, faced a common enemy – men. Schotland suggests that Chaucer in his writings showed "a profound appreciation of the value of female friendship as a defensive strategy."[121] However, lest one be too quick to suggest this as something of a feminist position on the part of Chaucer, one must wonder if he could envision any other basis of female friendship than women's general inferiority, particularly in the context of medieval romance.

If women, in Chaucer's view, might seek out friendship in the face of male aggression or abandonment, the bond of friendship between men could be easily broken on account of a woman, who was so often simply a passive object. In the same collection of essays in which is included the above article by Schotland, Robert Stretter examines

[121] Ibid., 525.

another set of Chaucerian friends: Palamon and Arcite from *The Knight's Tale*, who were not simply kinsmen, not simply friends in arms, but "sworn brothers," a relationship which "constitutes the most highly formalized mode of male friendship in the Middle Ages."[122] Despite the oaths made between the friends the relationship was threatened when both knights fall for the same woman.[123] The friendship was "saved" at the end, but only when Arcite was mortally wounded by his own horse, and insisted that Palamon marry Emily, the woman in question, who, for her part, had been praying to the Goddess Diana to keep her single.

The context of the medieval romance provided two models of friendship: one for men and one for women. For men, that friendship was, as in philosophical models, based on equality of virtue, but a chivalric virtue, and so the equality or at least near equality between the friends is understood. For women, who used friendship as a strategy of resistance, equality mattered little, and so widows and virgins, noble ladies and their maids, and even princesses and birds, could use friendship to protect themselves and each other from the common threat of men. These were friendships born of utility, not mutual virtue, and so however sympathetic Chaucer may have been to the plight of women, even within this literary context, female fellowship was of less worth than that between men. Thus, from a medieval perspective, even the imperfect friendships of men came from a

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[122] Robert Stretter, "Engendering Obligation: Sworn Brotherhood and Love Rivalry in Medieval English Romance," ibid. (Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co), 501. On sworn brotherhood see: Elizabeth A.R. Brown, "Ritual Brotherhood in Western Medieval Europe," *Traditio* 52 (1997).

[123] The more famous sworn brotherhood threatened by a woman, then as now, would certainly be between King Arthur and Lancelot. Those chivalric oaths could only be broken, it would seem, by such a desire.

place of value, while friendship between women was highly suspicious and at best born from their natural inferiority and social weakness.

The vast majority of scholarship on medieval friendship has focused on the topic from the perspective of medieval philosophy, theology, or monasticism. Yet, as we know, bonds of friendships could, and certainly did, form under a variety of circumstances, and most medieval friendship likely fell short of the ideals of perfect or even spiritual friendship. More recently scholars have looked for friendship in other contexts, particularly literary, where it is clear that representations of male and female friendships co–exist, albeit in radically different forms. Relationships represented in a myriad of texts can be easily identified as friendship to a modern reader, even if the medieval author did not define them as such. Examining how personal relationships are represented has the potential to tell historians much about the lived experience of men and women in the medieval world.

Chapter II: Holy Women in Their Communities

Sometime in the year 1274, a destitute young woman arrived in the Tuscan city of Cortona, the young son she had had with her long–term lover – now dead – in tow. Margaret was able to make a respectable life for herself (and eventually find the path to sainthood) thanks to two women who took her in, providing her shelter and support.[124] When the wealthy Umiliana De' Cerchi ended up in a horrible marriage, she found hope and companionship through providing charity alongside her sister–in–law.[125] And when Clare of Rimini was under attack by local preachers, it was her ability to hold sway over her female neighbors that had them most. concerned.[126] All three of these holy women, whose lives and experiences will be described in greater detail over the course of this chapter, were part of a growing movement of lay women who sought a religious lifestyle in the secular world. An important part of that secular world that they belonged to were the female friends and neighbors who surrounded them. This chapter will examine the networks of neighbors and friends within which independent holy women – like Margaret

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[124] For a recent edited Latin version of Margaret of Cortona's *vita* see Giunta Bevegnati, *Legenda De Vita Et Miraculis Beatae Margaritae De Cortona* (Grottaferrata: Collegium Bonaventurae ad Claras Aquas, 1997). For an English translation of this edition see *The Life and Miraces of Saint Margaret of Cortona*, trans. Thomas Renna (St. Bonaventure: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2012).

[125] Vitus Cortonensis, "*Vita Beatae Humilianae De Cherchis*," in *Acta Sanctorum* (Antwerp: 1685). For an English translation see: "Umiliana De' Cerchi of Florence (D. 1246)," in *Saints and Cities in Medieval Italy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

[126] The *vita* of Clare of Rimini was composed in Italian, rather than Latin. While the only extant manuscript of the *vita* is dated from the fifteenth–century, the text is thought to be composed shortly after her death. For an edited version of the Italian see: Jacques Dalarun, *"Lapsus Linguae," La Légende De Claire De Rimini* (Spoleto: Centro Itlaiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 1994). Dalarun also provided a partial English translation and summary of the *vita* in: "Gospel in Action: The Life of Clare of Rimini," *Franciscan Studies* 64 (2006).

of Cortona (d. 1297), Umiliana de' Cerchi (d. 1246), and Clare of Rimini (d. 1346) – circulated within. I will consider the function of those networks in the context of the daily lives and experiences of holy women whose existence and stories are known to us through their *vitae.*

All three women are identified as being of the Third Order of the Franciscans, but based on these *vitae*, how a tertiary ought to live was far from clear. There are some notable similarities and differences among these three women. All three lived a secular life before undergoing a spiritual conversion, although for Margaret (whose conversion occurred after the death of her lover) and Clare (who married twice and for much of her life was quite fond of worldly delights) the conversion was far more dramatic. All three women circulated within a similar level of society – among women of means, although not necessarily noble – and all three were and continue to be very much connected with their city, although Margaret of Cortona, originally from a town outside Perugia, was a transplant. Yet their ways of life and numerous aspects of their spiritual journey – in particular their spiritual challenges – that the hagiographers described in their individual *vitae* differ considerably.

When reading through a selection of female *vitae* from thirteenth– and fourteenth–century Italy, the variety of religious experiences and acts becomes immediately apparent. Among those female Italian saints identified in Rudolph Bell and Donald Weinstein's study, discussed in Chapter One, there are some nuns and abbesses as well as a few holy children who did not survive to adulthood. But many of these saints lived and died as laywomen. Furthermore, a number of those women who chose a more traditional path – becoming

nuns and abbesses – entered their respective orders later in life, some after their husbands died and others after living for a period of time as tertiaries. Some of these holy women followed a more typical route to sanctity, beginning with an inordinately pious childhood; others turned towards a more devout lifestyle as adults.

Among the lay saints of this period, we find travelers, servants, petulant teenagers, child martyrs, and politically savvy women. The variety of pious possibility in the *vitae* of Italian saints is one feature of this period that makes for a unique set of sources for scholars of hagiography, sanctity, or lay spirituality. A particularly unusual narrative concerns Bona of Pisa, who became the patron saint of that city, as well as of travelers of all sorts, including, more recently, flight attendants.[127] Dying in 1207, at the age of fifty-one, Bona was very much at the forefront of the trend toward independence for spiritually-minded females. Although she was an Augustine tertiary and mystic, her *vita* reads like an adventure story. St. Bona had wanted to live a pious life, and at ten she devoted herself to a life of poverty as an Augustine tertiary, but much of her devotion took the form of frequent pilgrimage, even being named an official guide to Santiago de Compostella by the Knights of Saint James (she was particularly devoted to James the Greater, who appeared to her in a vision). When Bona was thirteen, Christ appeared to Bona and her mother in pilgrim garb and insisted that Bona accompany him to the Holy Land. Even though her mother did not recognize Jesus, he evidently looked safe enough, and so she permitted Bona to go. Thus Bona headed out on her first journey, accompanied by a noblewoman by the name of Gaitiana and a servant girl named Massaia. Other saints – or perhaps more specifically

[127] Bona of Pisa was canonized by the papacy in 1962. Her *vita* can be found in: "Vita Beatae Bona Virgo, Pisis in Hetruria," in *Acta Sanctorum* (Antwerp: 1688).

other *vitae* – had other aims and concerns. In the *vita* of Ursulina di Parma (d. 1410) we find a different kind of saint: hers was a political rather than a contemplative or charitable calling.[128] Like the much more famous Catherine of Siena, Ursulina di Parma sought to end the papal schism, travelling twice to Avignon to meet with the antipope Clement VII and once to Boniface IX in Rome to implore one of them to step down. Saints of this period also came from all walks of life. For example we have the story of another city–saint: St. Zita of Lucca (d. 1272).[129] Zita was a poor girl from the countryside who in search of employment ventured to, where she went to work as a maid for a well–to–do family. She gave all that she had to the poor, thinking nothing of her own needs; however since she had very little, she would dip into her employer's goods. Luckily for her, whatever she took was miraculously restored, and even when her charitable giving was discovered, her overt piety and in particular her sense of charity, appeared to have moved her employer to not fire her. Zita is now a patron saint of Lucca, as well of maids and domestic servants.[130] These are but three examples of female lay saints from thirteenth– and fourteenth–century Italy; but this variety, which encompasses significant differences in social status, pious activity, and religious and secular struggles, speaks to the many possibilities for religious devotion

[128] Ursulina was beatified in 1786. For a recent published edition see: Simone Zanacchi, "Life of the Blessed Ursulina of Parma," in *Two Women of the Great Schism*, ed. Bruce L. Venarde and Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski (Toronto: Iter, Inc, 1990).

[129] While Zita was not affiliated with any order, an anonymous Franciscan wrote her life and the Franciscans popularized her cult. According to Vauchez, this was a common practice of the Franciscans with regards to saints who they hoped would be appealing to the laity. See Andre Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1997), 210. Her *vita* can be found in "Vita Santa Zita Virgine," in *Acta Sanctorum* (Antwerp: 1688). An English translation is available in Diana Webb, *Saints and Cities in Medieval Italy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

[130] Zita of Lucca was canonized in 1696. At the Basilica of San Frediano one can view her body enclosed in a glass coffin and prettily dressed, not unlike Snow White in Disney's version of the fairy tale.

within this period. The range of possibilities is especially notable in the case of bourgeois women, whose lives were generally quite constricted.

This chapter largely focuses on one particular "type" of saint: the independent holy woman who preferred to live on her own rather than in a religious community and who sought a contemplative life. One can imagine that the hagiographers of these female lay saints found themselves under considerable pressure to present these women as both worthy of devotion and familiar to a lay audience. Furthermore, through their narratives these writers needed to legitimize the way of life of their subjects, and the sheer variety of religious experience among those deemed particularly holy made this task all the more difficult. Female lay penitents challenged the traditional Catholic roles of women in many ways: refusing to become cloistered like traditional nuns; remaining independent of male protection and authority; and turning away from – sometimes literally fleeing – the traditional roles of wife and mother.

A prominent feature of lay sanctity in Italy was its urban nature, not simply in regard to where the saint lived, but in that the city became part of the narrative, and the saint was often embraced rather quickly as someone special to that city. Most of these holy women were closely connected to the cities in which they lived; many holy men and women from this period in medieval Italy can best be identified as "city–saints."[131] A number of the lay saints of this period, including those discussed here, continue to be celebrated in the city of their birth or death. For example, the travelling Saint Bona is

[131] I have adopted this term from Webb, *Saints and Cities in Medieval Italy*. For a thorough exploration of lay spirituality in Urban Italy, see Thompson, *Cities of God: The Religion of the Italian Communes 1125-1325*. See also: Vauchez, *The Laity in the Middle Ages: Religious Practices and Experiences*.

among the patron saints of her hometown of Pisa; after the death of Margaret of Cortona, her adopted city rebuilt a church and dedicated it to her, enshrining her body in a glass casket at the high altar; Zita, patron saint of the city of Lucca, received similar treatment. Diana Webb has translated and brought together seven *vitae* of Italian laymen and women in her recent collection, *Saints and Cities in Medieval Italy*.[132] Her subjects include a nobleman and a comb seller. Two of the saints are women whose lives will be discussed below: Umiliana De' Cerchi– referred to above – a widow from a rising Florentine family, and Zita, a virgin servant from the city of Lucca. Webb's collection, while small, is indicative of the variety of experience and background of lay holy men and women. In her introduction to the lives, she notes the distinctly urban settings of these *vitae*, but suggests that "[i]t is unlikely that hagiographers, who probably assumed the audience's familiarity with the material background, consciously set out to evoke a distinctive 'urban' setting. . ."[133] Perhaps not consciously, but the hagiographers were writing for a local audience. They wanted to raise the profile of their subject to be sure, but also to connect the holy person with the city and the people who lived there.

"City–saints" were intended to be representative of their cities or communities. Their stories were meant to arouse among the laity a connection based on the idea that the saint was, or at least had been at some point, one of their own, as well as a sense of urban pride. These saints might also reflect the lives and experiences of a certain segment of the population. Jacques Dalarun describes hagiography as "holy geography" in his examination

[132] Webb, *Saints and Cities in Medieval Italy*.
[133] Ibid., 21.

of the *vita* of Clare of Rimini.[134] By this, Dalarun means that the saint is located in a particular time and space. But that space in Dalarun's use of this term is not limited to the birthplace or place of residence of the saint, but takes into account her "social framework," that is, her status and place within her society. Placing the saint and her *vita* within a specific social framework is especially essential for these urban, female saints who are examined in this dissertation, with respect to both the intentions of the hagiographer and how historians should use and understand these *vitae*. The hagiographers of independent lay holy women validated the form of piety their subjects practiced and presented them as realistic examples for laywomen. Furthermore, these women were not, like the early Christian martyrs and ascetics, from some distant time and place; what made them useful role models for lay piety was their familiarity. Thus, consciously "urban," or not, these lives needed to read true to the lay men and women for whom they were intended, to provide both inspiration and moral guidance to Italian city dwellers in pursuit of piety. In this regard, the lay status of the saint cannot be separated from his or her "urban-ness", nor status and place within the society of the city.

Many of the individuals, male or female, whose local communities recognized them as saints, have not been officially recognized by the Catholic Church; even among those that have been either beatified or canonized, their cults remain small and local. Most medieval saints are largely known to us through *vitae* recounting their pious way of life and the miracles attributed to them, both before and after their deaths. For some saints, their initial hagiographer might have been a person who had known them, but the *vitae* of other saints may have been composed sometime after their death. Some saints were never the subject

[134] Dalarun, "Gospel in Action: The Life of Clare of Rimini," 184.

of hagiography, our knowledge of them coming to us through other, often much briefer, historical records. In this chapter and the next, I focus on the *vitae* of Italian holy women who lived in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and whose *vitae* were composed within 25 years of their deaths.[135] I have chosen to limit the sources in this way because the focus of this study is not so much on the individual saint herself, but on the way aspects of female friendship and social bonds were described by the hagiographer in the context of a holy woman, and how these aspects are used to narrative effect within the context of hagiographical writing. As this study is primarily interested with the representation of friendship and female community, the "facts" of the narrative as they pertain to the holy woman and her experiences are not of primary importance. However the hagiographers of these *vitae* were not too far removed from the saint herself, and as will be argued below, intended to depict their subject as a woman whom other lay women could relate to, not simply be in awe of. These women, despite their sanctity, had much in common with the everyday urban woman. In this aspect the *vitae* of lay, urban saints differ from many of those saints that preceded them.

Friendship and Female Society in the Daily Life of a Tertiary

The *vita* of Umiliana de' Cerchi (d. 1246) provides us with a sense of an extended network of friends and supporters in the everyday life of an urban saint. Umiliana, the daughter of a wealthy merchant, was married off by her family at the age of sixteen and produced two daughters before her husband died, a little more than five years into their marriage. The young widow returned to her family home and devoted herself to charity,

[135] With the exception of the *vita* of Margaret of Cortona, which consists of the saint's own account, and the texts of Angela of Foligno, which are not *vitae,* but her own spiritual works, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

helping the poor and the lepers in her city of Florence. After renouncing her inheritance and dedicating herself to a life of chastity, she made an unsuccessful bid to join the Poor Clares, and instead lived the rest of her brief life in a tower attached to her family home, dying in 1246 at the age of twenty–seven. Umiliana's *vita* begins with a list of thirty-four "witnesses to her sanctity"; all but three were women, and many of the witnesses appeared in episodes described in the narrative of her life. That such a large majority of the witnesses were women suggests that Umiliana circulated in a predominantly female context, with a few Franciscan friars to provide spiritual guidance and clerical oversight to the pious woman's lifestyle. The women who appear in the list of witnesses as well as the narrative itself were generally well off: some were married, some widowed and some had taken up the penitential life themselves.

The narrative of the *vita* gives a sense of the different relationships Umiliana had with those women around her. Three women in particular stand out in the *vita* of Umiliana: her sister–in–law Ravenna, and two other religious penitents, Gisla and Sobilia. All three of these women were important companions in piety to Umiliana, though in significantly different ways. Ravenna was a constant figure in the life of Umiliana and described as her "partner and confidante."[136] It was Ravenna's example that inspired Umiliana to lead a more devout life when she first married. Together, Umiliana and Ravenna practiced charity, giving the poor the food from their tables and the linens from their beds. Together they visited local holy places, the convent, and the hospital, "disregarding the threats of their husbands and the ill–treatment they received from them because of the time they spent in

[136] Webb, *Saints and Cities in Medieval Italy*, 100.

their lengthy visits."[137] We hear much less about Ravenna after Umiliana became a widow and chose the life of recluse. As a recluse, Umiliana refrained from the charitable activities that had previously taken up most of her time, time spent with Ravenna; but while the nature of their relationship changed, the two women remained close.[138]

One episode featuring Ravenna is particularly telling of the closeness that continued to exist between them, even if the two women did not see each other as often as in their younger days. It occurred in the second year of Umiliana's life as a recluse. It was Lent, and during this period Umiliana practiced devout silence. The devil, in an effort to tempt her to break her silence, produced the dead bodies of her kinfolk and tried to persuade Umiliana to speak with them, but she recognized them as illusions and ignored them. The devil took them away, but reappeared with images of her (still living) two daughters, saying to her "Do you say nothing to your daughters whom you see newly dead before you?" Umiliana was still not fooled. In a third attempt, the devil showed her the figures of Mary and the child Jesus, but still Umiliana refused to acknowledge his illusions. Finally, "After a little while, since she spurned this illusion, he produced the image of Monna Ravenna, saying 'Speak to your dear kinswoman, who has so faithfully visited you'." Umiliana still would not take the bait, and so "the devil disappeared with his figments, striking her such a heavy blow in the kidneys that her teeth were violently clashed together."[139] This devil seemed to have upped the ante with each new illusion, yet the final temptation was not some holy figure but Umiliana's earthly friend! In what seems to have been a bout of loneliness, the

[137] Ibid.
[138] While Umiliana lived alone, and often sought solitude, she did not completely withdraw from her family and friends.
[139] Webb, *Saints and Cities in Medieval Italy*, 109.

person Umiliana most longed for was her sister–in–law, the woman who had been her closest companion in the dark days of her marriage.

After enclosing herself in a tower attached to her father's home, Umiliana was less "out and about" in Florence, although her cell was not quite the prison that one might imagine. Umiliana might have cut down on her charitable activities, but she occasionally went out to visit her friends; furthermore she hosted many visitors in her cell. The most frequent was her confessor, and at times other Franciscans, including the hagiographer himself, also visited Umiliana, but most of her visitors were women of Florence who came to pray with her. The two fellow religious penitents, Gisla and Sobilia, become important in this period of Umiliana's life. Neither woman was a Florentine: Mugello, where Gisla lived, is an area about 20 miles north of Florence, and Sobilia lived about 35 miles south–east of Florence. Unfortunately, the *vita* provides no clues as to how Umiliana met these two women, but Umiliana journeys from her cell to visit both these women and likewise they visit her. Alas the hagiographer did not provide logistical details of such visits!

The friendships between Umiliana and these fellow penitents were quite different from each other. For Gisla, in particular, Umiliana acted in the role of advisor in her spiritual struggles. Poor Gisla was plagued with noisy neighbors who distracted her when she was at prayer. After Gisla complained of this on one of Umiliana's visits, God ceased the disturbances on account of Umiliana's intercession. Gisla was also tormented by the devil but was liberated when Umiliana once again interceded on her behalf. After Umiliana died, she appeared to Gisla while she slept, in order to remind her not to neglect doing

penance.[140] Sobilia and Umiliana's relationship, meanwhile, can best be described as that of confidantes who were each other's spiritual companions on a shared pious journey. Sobilia first appeared in the vita when Umiliana cured her of a badly broken arm.[141] Another time, when Umiliana was visiting her, the two women prayed together and Sobilia witnessed her companion being raised in the air.[142] After Umiliana died, she also appeared to Sobilia in her cell, just as she had with Gisla, but with a different message: Sobilia asked her friend many things about her experiences after death, the details of which she would not reveal to the hagiographer.[143] These post–mortem visitations are particularly indicative of the different type of relationships that Umiliana had with Gisla and Sobilia, the former as spiritual guide and the latter as a spiritual partner; Gisla is left with a gentle scolding while the more spiritually advanced Sobilia is graced with revelations of the afterlife.[144] While Umiliana circulated in a broad network of women, her friendships with Sobilia and Gisla, alongside that with Ravenna, certainly stand out in the text of Umiliana's *vita*.[145] Furthermore, these three women played different roles in the saint's life: Ravenna was a partner and companion who shared with Umiliana the experiences of a horrible marriage and a zeal for charity. For Gisla, Umiliana was a spiritual guide, there to encourage her

[140] Ibid., 139.
[141] Ibid., 113 - 14.
[142] Ibid., 126.
[143] Ibid., 137 - 38. The hagiographers were often kept in the dark about conversations between a saint and her female companion or confidante. This will be discussed more thoroughly in the following chapter.
[144] The relationship between Gisla and Umiliana is akin to spiritual friendship while that between Sobilia and Umiliana seems closer to the form of perfect Christian friendship that Augustine sought in *Confessions.* The hagiographer did not explicitly make such distinctions or comparisons, but the details of the narrative clearly depict differences in these two friendships.
[145] Notably, all three women appear in the list of witness, thus it is possible that the accounts of their interactions with Umiliana were, at least in part, provided by the women themselves.

when the holy life became difficult to endure. Sobilia, on the other hand, was not struggling like Gisla, and the relationship between the two women was one of spiritual companionship.

While Umiliana was presented as being quite comfortable with her female friendships, for Margaret of Cortona (d. 1297) relationships with other women were much more fraught. Her *vita* is unique, as it consists the holy woman's personal account – rather than a narrative formed by a hagiographer after her death – of her revelations and daily challenges, which she dictated to her confessor as she became increasingly engrossed in her internal penance and salvation. In the text we find quite illuminating evidence about women who provided the saint with some necessary practical assistance, although at times their generosity interfered with Margaret's spiritual pursuits. Margaret was born to a well–to–do family in Laviano, near Perugia. At the age of seventeen, Margaret ran away from her home with her lover. She lived with him for ten years, during which time they had a son. However, when her lover was tragically murdered, she was left on her own. Rejected by both her own family and that of her lover, she turned to God, who led her to Cortona, where she was taken in by two noble ladies, Marinaria and Raneria. Very little personal information is given about these two ladies in the text. We do not know their marital status, for example.[146] But they provided material support for Margaret (and her son) when she first came to Cortona, and during her quest to take on the habit of a Franciscan tertiary. The

[146] Other women who display exemplary piety or particular goodness are common in the *vitae.* Other examples include Sobilia, Gisla, and Ravenna in Umiliana's *vita.* But they were not the saints, and so the hagiographers (or in the case of Margaret, the source herself) rarely provided much, if any, biographical information or details about their lives, beyond their interactions with the holy woman.

Franciscans were initially reluctant to bestow this honor upon her, on account of her past transgressions.

In the early period of her penitential life, Margaret supported herself and her son through begging and also, thanks to referrals by Marinaria and Raneria, working as a midwife for noble women. But God insisted that Margaret become increasingly distant from secular society so that she might devote more time to devotion and prayer. Margaret did distance herself, but gradually, and never completely. In this way she was like Umiliana, who also gave up her charitable work to pursue a more contemplative life style. When she left the immediate protection of Marinaria and Raneria, she found a house "set off from the disturbances of the crowd yet close to the homes of noble ladies, in order to stay more hidden and safe."[147] When she moved even farther away, outside the walls of Cortona, she lived alone, but her female neighbors and companions took it upon themselves to ensure her practical needs were met, bringing food to the holy woman and, occasionally, driving petitioners from her door. Even though Margaret tried to avoid secular society and she no longer performed acts of charity in public, the needy came to her. She, of course, gave to them whatever she had, even if that meant having nothing herself. The noble women in her neighborhood, concerned that Margaret would waste away, "against her [Margaret's] will, they strove to drive away from her cell the poor, whom she loved to the very core of her being, so that she might have the opportunity to hang on to something for herself."[148] It was not just the poor who sought out Margaret; the neighboring noble women were also drawn to her little cell, often drawn by the sounds of the saint's weeping. But Margaret is

[147] Bevegnati, *The Life and Miraces of Saint Margaret of Cortona*, 52.
[148] Ibid., 54.

not a simple curiosity for these women; rather they are so taken by her devotion that they, too, end up weeping and praying aloud. In one instance where the local noble women were outside Margaret's cell, one woman who evidently considered herself a zealous defender of the saint, attempted to drive them away. One women, in particular took offence, and the resulting shouting match that ensued ended up interrupting Margaret's prayers.[149] It took some effort for Margaret to smooth things out. This was no easy task since, according to the narrative, "when anger rages, particularly in women, all that is justly spoken is believed to be perverse."[150] The offended woman stormed away, but Margaret, always the peace-maker, tried to soothe her anger by sending her own dinner to the enraged woman. Alas, it is not indicated in the text if this strategy worked. Nevertheless, this scene provides us a colorful picture of neighborhood life for Cortona's female nobility.

Of all the *vitae* of independent holy women that I have encountered from this period, that of Margaret of Cortona is the one in which instances of fellowship or community were most fraught, in which laywomen were interpreted as being a potentially destabilizing force. Yet at the same time, it was two laywomen, the noble ladies Marinaria and Raneria, who offered Margaret much-needed security in a time of great need. A simple comparison of Umiliana and Margaret of Cortona reveals that while Umiliana found strength and purpose in her relationships with other women despite seeking a degree of

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[149] The original Latin to describe Margaret's protectress reads "Accidit autem quod quedam mulier, quodam zelo ducta custodie" which Thomas Renna translates as " Once, motivated by zeal to protect Margaret, her companion. . ." However, the Latin nor the text is entirely clear if this zealous defender of Margaret was her companion, who we do hear about time to time in the text, or simply a neighborhood woman who chose to take on this role. For the Latin original see: *Legenda De Vita Et Miraculis Beatae Margaritae De Cortona*, 250. For Renna's translation see: *The Life and Miraces of Saint Margaret of Cortona*, 114.

[150] *The Life and Miraces of Saint Margaret of Cortona*, 114. One wonders if this is Margaret's view of women or the voice of her confessor–scribe peeking through.

solitude, Margaret found them a challenging distraction. Umiliana found a balance between living the life of an ascetic and maintaining a place in her urban society but Margaret never achieved such a balance. Thus, while Marinaria and Raneria provided material support for Margaret, no woman comes forth as a friend in piety, in the way of Ravenna, Sobilia, or Gisla in the *vita* of Umiliana. Important to this comparison is that Margaret herself narrated her experiences to her confessor. Thus, it is an account from the perspective of a holy woman herself as opposed to the perspective of a hagiographer. One might presume that Umiliana's hagiographer sought to present his subject in as positive and as ideal a light as possible while ensuring she was still a useable model of lay piety. In Margaret's *vita*, on the other hand, the real day to day problems of being an ascetic holy woman in urban Italy are not simply more apparent, but central to the narrative.

Clare of Rimini, like Margaret of Cortona, adopted a holy way of life after having experienced the pleasures of the world, although, unlike Margaret, she did so within the limits of moral society. While Umiliana had married – voluntarily one should add – her *vita* suggests that for her married life was something of challenge to get through, not something to be enjoyed. Clare, on the other hand, married twice, the second time, at the age of twenty-four, with a wealthy, politically connected man, "whom she had loved and desire over any good order, burning by the love she had for him not only because he pleased her, but also because he was rich of money and other riches, and powerful in the homeland of Rimini."[151] But one day, while visiting the church of Saint Francis in Rimini, the Virgin appeared to Clare and questioned her about the value of possessions and luxuries. After

[151] Dalarun, "Gospel in Action: The Life of Clare of Rimini," 185. The original text can be found in: *"Lapsus Linguae," La Légende De Claire De Rimini*, 20. Going forward, citations are provided for both the English summary and Dalarun's edition of the original Italian text.

this experience she underwent a complete conversion and although still married and living with her husband (although chastely), she adopted a religious habit. Her husband did not interfere with her conversion, helpfully dying and leaving her a widow once again.[152]

Having converted to the religious life and finding herself a widow, Clare sought the independent life enjoyed by Umiliana and Margaret of Cortona, but it took her some time to find it. Her family, the Agolanti, was Ghibelline, and Clare was caught up in the continual conflict between the Guelfs and the Ghibellines of Rimini.[153] In exile with her family in Urbino, Clare claimed a tower at the Bishop's palace, although the canons of the Cathedral complained about her nightly cries of anguish.[154] Once her family was allowed to return to Rimini, she lived first in the house of her brother, until, much to her satisfaction, she found a small room within the ancient Roman walls of the city, where she took up residence.[155] This search for real independence in the form of her own space differs from Umiliana's experience; Umiliana continued to live in her family house, although her family did not seem to have troubled her, nor were they involved in her daily life (and vice–versa). Umiliana's family was not supportive of her desire to take on a religious lifestyle, but

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[152] "Gospel in Action: The Life of Clare of Rimini," 186-87. *"Lapsus Linguae," La Légende De Claire De Rimini*, 24-25.

[153] Clare was not the only holy woman caught up in the intrigues and violent political clashes that so often rocked Italian cities. Anne M. Schuchman has pointed out that while the hagiographer asserted that Umiliana withdrew from society, the events in her *vita* demonstrated otherwise. Schuchman suggests that the hagiographer perhaps intended "society" to mean the political intrigues of Florence's male population from which he clearly wanted to separate his new–found saint. See: Anne M. Schuchman, "The Lives of Umiliana De' Cerchi: Representations of Female Sainthood in Thirteenth-Century Florence," *Essays in Medieval Studies* 14 (1997).

[154] Dalarun, "Gospel in Action: The Life of Clare of Rimini," 192. *"Lapsus Linguae," La Légende De Claire De Rimini*, 29.

[155] "Gospel in Action: The Life of Clare of Rimini," 194. *"Lapsus Linguae," La Légende De Claire De Rimini*, 31.

Clare's family does not appear to have impeded her in any way; yet it is Umiliana who stays in the family home and Clare who seeks her own dwelling place. Clare's experiences made her more akin to Margaret in this regard, as Margaret too struggled to find an ideal living situation. Margaret of Cortona had long since been abandoned by her family; rather it was laywomen from whom she sought to separate herself, although her attempts proved to be rather fruitless. Of course, it does not help that Margaret continued to live in their midst! It is with respect to this aspect of their experiences that these two worldly holy women differed considerably; while Margaret of Cortona struggled to keep her fawning female admirers at bay, Clare actively sought out spiritually minded female companions. Thus, for example, her *vita* described how Clare often visited with a group of Cistercian nuns with whom she enjoyed discussing religious topics, such as the lives of saints. These Cistercian nuns were of a group that had fled from Constantinople, and were seeking refuge in Rimini. Clare likewise provided assistance to a community of Poor Clares, who had also fled to Rimini, going so far as to carry heavy wooden beams on her back to help the nuns build a shelter.[156] Indeed, one wonders what made Rimini so desirable to refugee nuns! Something else that is made clear by these interactions is that Clare – or her hagiographer – did not necessarily see a conflict between more traditional religious women and lay holy women like Clare. Rather their shared pious venture provided common ground, despite their different paths.

Compared to Margaret of Cortona and Umiliana de Cerchi, Clare took on for herself quite an active role in attempting to lead others into a penitential life (although not

[156] "Gospel in Action: The Life of Clare of Rimini," 194-95. *"Lapsus Linguae," La Légende De Claire De Rimini*, 32.

necessarily to join her little community of women). In this endeavor she reached out to both men and women. Her female converts to the religious life appear to have been women of some means, and this activity drew the attention of the area's Franciscan inquisitors, who accused her of directly and purposefully undermining male authority through her relationships with other women. She was subject to direct questioning, but also found herself being publically preached against by the Franciscans. One particularly vehement preacher suggested that she was both a heretic and in league with the devil, and specifically encouraged husbands to prohibit their wives from associating with Clare, although it is not clear if his issue was with the weakness of women generally or Clare in particular.[157] This is quite telling when one compares Clare with other independent holy women of this place and period, as this was a rare instance, in the lives examined here, of a woman coming under attack, very publicly. Contrary to the other *vitae* that describe female relationships, the *vita* of Clare of Rimini is a notable instance of accusation of the dangers of female interactions being raised against a female saint in this period[158]. Of the women examined here, Clare of Rimini was the only one who seemed to have experienced such vehement clerical pushback, and so is perhaps a useful reminder that what these women were pursuing was something new, and potentially even radical and threatening. While men whose message appeared unorthodox to the Church could also find themselves under close scrutiny and accusations of heresy, the particular charges that are leveled at Clare – that she had undue influence over the wives of Rimini – suggests a particularly gendered bias

[157] "Gospel in Action: The Life of Clare of Rimini," 198. *"Lapsus Linguae," La Légende De Claire De Rimini*, 35-36.
[158] Considering that in this period heresy was perceived as a growing threat, there may have been many other women who acted similarly to Clare of Rimini but who did not escape the charges.

on the part of her accusers. Thus the issue was not simply that she was exerting influence in a way deemed too close to preaching, but that she was targeting women. That Clare of Rimini was the only one of our group of saints here who encountered this sort of official criticism is somewhat extraordinary. Indeed, it is surprising that the *vitae* of other holy women do not indicate much if any concerted effort to curtail or suppress their activities. Thus, in the case of the holy women described in this chapter, Umiliana faced no criticism, and for Margaret, it is the other women and their insistence on speaking to her and showing up at her door that pose a serious spiritual dilemma but for the saint herself, rather than church authorities. Of course neither of these women were particularly interested in proselytizing, while Clare was clearly seeking out the fellowship of like-minded women. Still, this sort of suspicion of female fellowship that is apparent in the *vita* of Clare of Rimini – rampant in medieval discourse in general – was rare within the *vitae* of such saints.

Were these accusations and suspicions, perhaps, what led Clare to eventually forsake her little cell in the wall and establish her own community of religious women? While Clare initially sought solitude and a space of her own, she increasingly gathered about her like-minded women, what Jacques Dalarun in his analysis of her *vita* describes as "a little circle of female solidarity."[159] From the point of her conversion, her hagiographer referred to her as *soror Chiara*, and her female companions as sisters, but it is clear from the text that neither she nor they were religious sisters in the formal sense; that is, no vows were taken. However, when a neighbor offered to sell to Clare his little house, and she had a

[159] Dalarun, "Gospel in Action: The Life of Clare of Rimini," 195. This phrasing calls to mind those medieval depictions of female friends, discussed in Chapter One, where the purpose of friendship among women is to protect themselves against male aggression.

vision encouraging her to establish a community for her sisters, she did just this for herself and six sisters, one of whom was her sister by birth, Drudula. Still, Clare was often found in her old hole in the wall in the middle of the night.[160] But what sort of community did Clare actually establish? While the hagiographer began to use terms like *ordine* (order) and *costume* (habit), and the women appear to have been living by some sort of rule, Clare's little establishment was not any sort of officially recognized community, even though she is often described in modern dictionaries as having established a house of Poor Clares.[161] Rather, her "order" appears to have been something of a singular and temporary group of likeminded women. Once living together, Clare's sisters assumed a role quite common among companions of the particularly devout – trying to persuade her to eat more food, and engage in less harsh penance. For eighteen years, the saint only consumed bread and water, to which she added oil on Easter and Sundays. But in order to please her "*compagne"* (female companions) and "*sorelle"* (sisters), she pretended for three years to eat vegetables.[162] The hagiographers choice of words here – *compagne* and *sorelle* – make the form of community established by Clare even more undefined. Clare's *vita* ends, rather oddly with the saint weak and ill, but not yet dead.[163]

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[160] Ibid., 202. *"Lapsus Linguae," La Légende De Claire De Rimini*, 38-39.
[161] "Gospel in Action: The Life of Clare of Rimini," 205. *"Lapsus Linguae," La Légende De Claire De Rimini*, 42-43.
[162] *"Lapsus Linguae," La Légende De Claire De Rimini*, 23-24.
[163] "Gospel in Action: The Life of Clare of Rimini," 215. Clare did not have the same degree of local fame as either Umiliana or Margaret of Cortona, although her cult was eventually recognized by the Papacy, and she was beatified in 1782. Still she hardly went unnoticed, inspiring a piece of art shortly after her death: a panel of a triptych based on one of Clare's visions dated to 1330.

Making Lay Holy Life Acceptable

Clare of Rimini's experiences, although rare among these narratives, are indicative of what must have been a real concern for the hagiographers, the saints themselves, and their supporters: making this way of life acceptable. In a society that offered no legitimate role for a woman not under the authority of a man, independent or single women were viewed with curiosity at best, but were rarely above suspicion. Vito Cortonensis, Umiliana's hagiographer, described her as the first Florentine tertiary. While this was not the case, Anne Schuchman has argued that Umiliana's *vita* was designed to legitimize what was largely a new form of lay, feminine piety, and that her hagiographer was trying to marry the eremitic tradition with Italian urban life.[164] Previously the model for hagiography had been rural and separatist. Margaret of Cortona was also trying to live as a spiritual recluse within an urban setting. Scenes described above where Margaret cannot seem to escape from public view are reminiscent of the lives of the early desert fathers, who tried to withdraw from society but could not escape from onlookers or admirers. Yet there are some significant differences in Margaret's situation from those holy men during the first centuries of Christianity. She did not retreat to the wilderness; even at her most reclusive she lived in a town just outside the city of Cortona. Furthermore, Margaret seems to have found that personally resisting the allure of communication with others was a real challenge. The *Vitae* of both Umiliana and Margaret demonstrate that the role or place of lay, penitential women within urban society was unclear at best. Both hagiographers described their subjects in relation to the desert fathers, drawing on those early examples

[164] Schuchman, "The Lives of Umiliana De' Cerchi: Representations of Female Sainthood in Thirteenth-Century Florence."

of individual piety, but neither Margaret nor Umiliana had the desire to flee to the wilderness, or even the security of convent walls, thus presenting a challenge for those who sought to make acceptable the holiness of women who refused or were denied the traditional pious opportunities available to them.

A significant challenge faced by the hagiographers of female lay saints was demonstrating that the type of life they had chosen was indeed a path to spiritual enrichment: that these women living on their own – outside the protection of convent walls and the strict discipline of the Church – were as devout and as pure as the nun in her habit, a challenge often made more tricky by their lack of virginity and tendency to push back against authority figures. Indeed a woman's own family was often her biggest obstacle to her leading the life of a lay penitent. While this was a common topos in the stories of many a saintly nun, within a society where the notion of a woman (of a certain class) living without male protection was upsetting to say the least, fleeing one's family for the protection of the veil and convent walls was significantly easier for hagiographers to digest than refusing to marry or remarry in order to live all by oneself in the middle of the city! These holy women, whether virgins or widows, lived outside the traditional family structure, even when, in some cases, they continued to live on the family estate.

While her male confessors provided clerical oversight to the holy woman's way of life as well as spiritual support and guidance, the presence of other women helped to demonstrate the life of the holy woman as meaningful, as well as above suspicion. Often, though certainly not always, cut off from their families, these independent holy women sometimes relied on the practical support that a circle of female friends and acquaintances

could provide. They acted as witnesses to the potential saint's piety and they received spiritual assistance from her, but at the same time such women also took care of her practical needs, and provided companionship and a link to civil society. All of this, within the context of this brand of piety, was essential to promoting the legitimacy of this way of life. The challenge of meeting one's practical needs and staying connected to secular society was not an issue for male lay saints, who often continued to maintain their position in society. In the context of male lay sainthood, the dilemma was rather how to negotiate a pious life while earning a living.[165]

The presence of other, respectable, women in the *vita* of these independent holy women also reflected the need to ensure the safety of a woman – often young – who lived alone in a city; safety from scandal and rumor as well as safety from potential assault or abuse. The confessors' role as depicted in the *vitae* is quite limited to hearing confession and providing some spiritual guidance. Indeed, within the *vitae* that are composed (or transcribed as in the case of Margaret of Cortona) by the confessor, there are no references of he himself or other friars or religious figures providing food for the saint or other material necessities. On the one hand, perhaps friars and other male church figures were not interested in taking on the role of caretaker, which would have seemed more suitable for a woman. On the other hand, it is likely that confessors would want to keep a certain distance from their subject to maintain the respectability of the relationship between the holy woman and her confessor; this respectability could easily be put in jeopardy if the

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[165] Vauchez, *The Laity in the Middle Ages: Religious Practices and Experiences*, 65.

confessor provided some sort of bodily assistance such as providing food. To witness a saint undergo a mystical experience was something special – these were moments of spiritual intimacy – and hagiographers and confessors most often depended on female witnesses to relay such experiences. But following her confession (made directly to the Lord) and conversion from woman of sin to penitent, Margaret of Cortona's confessor was granted this special privilege: "While sweetness of this kind is not often granted to many others, Friar Ranaldo the custodian, Friar Ubaldo the guardian, Marzio, the lady Gilia, and I, her confessor, on that day witnessed Margaret lifted up in an abundant ecstasy, and lose her senses and mobility."[166] The text does not indicate what lady Gilia was doing in the church at the time but while the friars give spiritual weight to this scene, perhaps the mere presence of the lady Gilia helped to establish the respectability of this scenario. Likewise, when Margaret acts as a midwife, it is for noble ladies, and even the women who she complains about pestering her in church are described as "pious."[167] In the witness list of Umiliana de' Cerchi, all the women are identified as *domina* or lady, with the exception of a few holy sisters, again indicating that the network of women that surrounded this saint were all members of elite society. Compared with other *vitae* of this period, the lack of female companions is glaring in the *vita* of the servant girl, Zita. The reason lies in both status of the saint and the intended example she was supposed to set. Whereas Zita was a poor girl from the country-side, the independent holy women that are the focus of this dissertation were women of some means, although not necessarily the daughters or widows of the upper-most urban elite. Thus, for example, the family of Umiliana were

[166] Bevegnati, *The Life and Miraces of Saint Margaret of Cortona*, 59. Who this lady Gilia is, or what her relationship is to Margaret is unknown, but she does re-appear in the *vita* as a subject of Margaret's prayers.
[167] Ibid., 62.

merchants, whose power and esteem were rising and Margaret's family, and her lover, were not poor even though Margaret eventually found herself destitute, and she circulated among upper-class women.

Zita was a very different saint than these holy independent women, and her *vita* seems to have a different intention. While other independent holy women like Umiliana and Margaret withdraw or lessen their charity work to focus on their contemplative relationship with God, Zita's way of life and her claim to sanctity was based on charity. Her cult grew in a period of growing prosperity for the city of Lucca; perhaps the simple charity of a poor serving girl was certainly intended to humble a city whose inhabitants were growing richer through commercial activity. The most important witness to her charitable activity was her master, reflecting the intended audience of this *vita*. Zita did not need a community of women to bear witness to her sanctity, nor to provide legitimacy for her way of life; as a poor girl she was not inhibited by similar concerns over propriety. Indeed, this difference is most evident when considering Zita's interactions with prostitutes. Zita was not just poor, but also innocent, and perhaps even a little naive. Among her charitable deeds was giving up her own bed for others: paupers, pilgrims, as well as prostitutes. Of the latter, the hagiographer writes of Zita's intention that "reasoning in her simplicity that she could at least preserve them one night's defilement."[168] There is no indication that Zita in any way reformed these fallen women, either intentionally or unintentionally, but neither is there any retribution towards Zita, nor any smudge against her character. This speaks further to the intention of this *vita*: to demonstrate the blind charity of a simple girl which extends to the most lowly in society. It is very difficult to imagine Clare of Rimini,

[168] Webb, *Saints and Cities in Medieval Italy*, 171.

having already experienced the inquisition, being free to bring prostitutes, even unwittingly, to share her hole in the wall! Charity was well and good, but no upper class family wanted their daughter to fraternize (sororize?) with the lower classes, and certainly not the likes of common prostitutes. Indeed this fear of one's daughter, sister, or mother being forced to live and pray beside women of lesser status is what let to convents being such elite establishments in the first place! Based on the models of Umiliana and Margaret, such spiritually-minded lay women chose to eschew charity for a more contemplative life. Charitable activities were best left to those less spiritually advanced, as Umiliana was in her younger, married years. Even in the lives of the desert fathers, charity was but a precursor to greater spiritual advancement, in keeping with the clerical tendency to privilege the contemplative over the active life. A poor serving girl like Zita was not expected to obtain that level of spiritual enlightenment; and indeed she would not have had the resources to pursue such a life, even if she had been so inclined.

Moral suspicion was not the only danger a holy woman needed to be wary of, but physical danger as well. Being surrounded by other women provided some necessary physical protection to these holy women who opted to live alone. Furthermore, these women needed to be above suspicion and respectable themselves. Thus, when Margaret of Cortona leaves the protection of Marinaria and Raniera, the narrative specifically sates that she continued to live among "noble ladies in order to stay more hidden and safe."[169] In this aspect even travelling independent holy women required some sort of female companionship. Ursulina of Parma, discussed above, had as her travelling companion her mother. Bona of Pisa, our pilgrim saint, had with her on all her adventures the lady

[169] Bevegnati, *The Life and Miraces of Saint Margaret of Cortona*, 52.

Gatiana. The hagiographer does not write very much about Gatiana or the women's relationship, however, it would be amiss not to note one particular event from Bona's *vita* that is indicative of the evident bond between the women. On one pilgrimage, when Bona fell ill in Rome, on account of her extreme fasting, Gaitiana feared that her companion would die, and that she would have to chop off Bona's head to return it to Pisa. Luckily, Gaitiana was saved from this gruesome deed, when Bona insisted that she prepare them dinner so that they might both regain their strength for the journey home.[170] While neither Ursulina or Bona are the same type of saint that my dissertation focuses on, it is relevant to note that both these upper class women who pursued an independent life style required protection from rumour and assault, and that protection came in the form of other women of the same class.

The figure of the independent holy laywoman herself, as well as the stories of her pious life, provided a model of spiritual lay life for urban women with some means. Saints like Umiliana and Margaret of Cortona, with their local cults, were singularly suited to providing such models of pious living within an urban setting. The hagiographers of Umiliana de' Cerchi, Margaret of Cortona, and Clare of Rimini were not simply concerned with legitimizing the existence of the independent lay holy woman: these women were also intended to be examples of the possibilities in lay piety for urban women, but even more specifically, urban women who came from families of means, who engaged in charity, and

[170] "Vita Beatae Bona Virgo, Pisis in Hetruria," 151.

who circulated within networks of similar women. Hence the importance of female friends and companions within these lives was, in part, intended to reflect the social circles of the women who were the targeted audience of these *vitae.* This chapter argued that because the hagiographers of these holy women sought to present their subjects as a manifestation of the divine within the context of urban life, various other women – friends and neighbors – were necessary to the lives of the holy women, as intermediaries between the saint and her society. They provided companionship and material support for women who chose to live the life of a hermit without actually leaving the world behind. For lay holy women who chose to live independently in their city, other women played a number of crucial roles that allowed for the possibility of a female urban recluse. While these urban recluses – un–cloistered and living alone – were under the guidance of male spiritual figures, local women acted as caretakers, companions, and witnesses to the holy women's piety. Yet within the different *vitae*, the nature of the relationships that a holy woman had with other women in her local community – and how the hagiographer portrayed these relationships – varied considerably. An examination and comparison of three *vitae* of lay holy women, all connected with the Franciscans, illuminates not only the various roles that female companions played within each saint's life, but also the extent to which the women, and even more so their male Franciscan hagiographers, were continually trying to determine what the life of a religiously–minded lay woman should look like.

Despite the rather dramatic rise in numbers of female lay saints, this age of religious experiment for woman, lasting the thirteenth through the fifteenth century, was relatively brief, as penitential communities began to look more like traditional convents, and women who tried to avoid any sort of enclosure were looked upon with growing suspicion. In 1298

Pope Boniface VIII issued the decretal *Periculoso*, which stated that all professed religious women everywhere must be cloistered. While this decree sought to regulate nuns of all orders – both longstanding and newer orders like the Poor Clares – its was issued largely to demarcate professed nuns from other religious women, suggesting continuing discomfort with other experimental ways of life.[171] The Church, secular society, and even the women themselves were unsure of how to navigate this new spiritual and social terrain; their status was often unclear, as was their purpose. This accounts for the variety of experiences we find in the narratives of these holy women. Luckily for historians and readers of medieval hagiography, the uncertainty of the hagiographers in how to portray their subjects resulted in the many details and experiences that can be found in these *vitae*. Furthermore, these hagiographers could not just separate their lay saint from the lay society that she came from and within which she continued to circulate and so in the narrative, lay society was not just a foil against which the saint's holiness was magnified. These are not just the stories of saints, but of lay saints; these are stories of laywomen seeking holiness within their secular worlds.

[171] The *Periculoso* was issued a number of times over the following centuries, including at the 1563 Council of Trent, where stiffer sanctions were added. Regarding the *Periculoso* and these attempts at strict enclosure, see, for example, Elizabeth Makowski, *Canon Law and Cloistered Women: Periculoso and Its Commentators, 1298-1545* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1997).

Chapter III: Friendship, Community and the Spiritual Path

The *vita* of the Blessed Benvenuta Bojani is overflowing with references to the holy woman's *amicae* (friends), who received plenty of spiritual and practical benefits from this relationship – in one miracle recounted by the hagiographer, Benvenuta cured a special friend of a sensitivity to cheese.[172] Later on, this same friend experienced with the saint a mystical experience brought about by a (spiritually) passionate kiss. The individual friendships of varying degrees of intimacy that Benvenuta formed over the course of her life are extreme examples of the ways in which female fellowship often became an integral part of a holy woman's sanctity in this period. In this view of friendship in the *vitae* of these female saints, the saint's female acquaintances did not merely provide material support or act as witnesses to her piety or miracles; rather they become active participants in the saint's pious journey.

The preceding chapter examined the ways in which an independent holy woman's connections in her community facilitated her pious lifestyle. Thus fellowship and female networks of supports for Umiliana, Bona, and even Margaret of Cortona, provided a framework for the role of the holy woman in society and element of a holy woman's pious practice: for example where a female friend becomes a necessary confidante, who takes on a more active role than simply bearing witness to the saint's piety and miracles. While in the previous chapter, I focused exclusively on women who opted to live independently (neither in a convent nor in a tertiary community), this chapter will explore holy women

[172] "Vita Devotissimae Benevenutae De Foro-Julii," in *Acta Sanctorum* (Antwerp: 1883). Please note the variation in spelling of the saint's name. I will be using the more common spelling of Benvenuta.

practicing a variety of life–styles. In the lives of independent holy women, tertiaries living in a community, and nuns enclosed in the convent, other women acted as witnesses and spiritual confidantes. Even in the (theoretical) uniformity of the cloister, individual women were often described as assisting the holy woman in her pursuit of holy perfection, in the course of which close and intimate relationships were formed. The interactions between women examined in this chapter are key elements with which a hagiographer showcased the holy woman's piety. In some *vitae*, presenting friendship as a positive element in the experiences of the saint, such as in the v*ita* of Umiliana de' Cerchi, appears to have been part of the strategy of the hagiographer. On the other hand in texts where the holy woman herself was a participant in the text's creation, such as the *vita* of Margaret of Cortona, friendship was more often presented as an obstacle, challenge, or predicament. In either case, however, friendship and fellowship between the saint and other women – or the rejection of such relationships – was a lens through which to observe her piety. For independent lay holy women, friends were necessary companions, not only because of the practical purposes they served, but because in the context of medieval urban Italy, friendships and networks of female support were so fundamental to the lives of lay women.

Friendship as a Path or Obstacle to Sanctity

For some holy women, such as Clara Gambacorta and Margaret of Cortona, friendship and female fellowship figured into their experiences as holy women as negative experiences or roadblocks on the woman's devotional path. While this narrative was rare – friendship was more often presented positively in these *vitae* – these examples are as indicative of the importance of female fellowship in the lives of medieval women. For both these women, relationships with other women present complications in their holy

journeys. As discussed in the previous chapter, for Margaret the presence of other women was a constant spiritual challenge to be fought against, but the women she interacted were largely supportive of her and her way of life. On the other hand Clara Gambacorta (d. 1419), a Dominican nun from Pisa, experienced not friendship and support but ridicule from her fellow nuns.[173] After Clara's first husband died and her father attempted to force her into a second marriage, she ran away to join a group of Poor Clares. Her father came after her and imprisoned her for six months in a tower, but eventually he let Clara join the Dominicans. In Richard Kieckhefer's study of fourteenth–century saints, he includes Clara as one of three representative saints of the period. For Kieckhefer, Clara's *vita* was far from exceptional:

> The details of her life appear conventional, as if entire sections were composed of topoi from traditional saints' lives. Her lavish generosity, her devotional life, and other elements of her sanctity, while entirely plausible, distinguish her little or not at all from numerous other saints from whose vitae the biographer might have borrowed.[174]

It is indeed the case that aspects of Clara's v*ita* are conventional for *vitae* in general, but her life also includes elements that reflect the spirit of religious experimentation that was pervasive in this era. Her first foray into enclosed living did not go so well. Trying to escape her father's attempt to force her into a second marriage, she ran off to a convent of Poor Clares where she took the habit: "this same Thora from then on [was] named Sister Clara,

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[173] Clara's *vita* was originally written in Italian by a fellow nun, but the original text has not been published. See "De B. Clara Gambacorta," in *Acta Sanctorum* (1675). Clara's cult was approved in 1830.

[174] Richard Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls: Fourtheenth-Century Saints and Their Religious Milieu* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 46-47.

as she had wanted."[175] Unfortunately, Clara's sojourn with the Poor Clares was short lived, as her father, brothers, and a group of their friends showed up at the gates, swords in hand, demanding that the nuns turn her over. We perhaps cannot be too harsh towards the Poor Clares for complying – they barely knew Clara, after all. When she finally took the veil, it was with the Dominicans, although despite this negative experience with the Poor Clares, she still kept her new name.[176] But unfortunately for Clara, the Dominican women, while they did not throw her out, they did not provide much of a spiritual sanctuary, as they continually taunted Clara for her ascetic practices. A common theme found in the *vitae* of more traditional holy women was the animosity of other nuns. In Clara's case, it was the condition of her clothing that her fellow sisters found hard to take:

> A lover of poverty and an extraordinary zealot, she [Clara] wore only cheap and patched clothing; a heavy and absurd veil, and worn and broken shoes, which the other Sisters had thrown away: and never once did she remove her clothing, lest she waste time in loosening and removing them. Thus any time these cracks [in her shoes] squeaked unpleasantly in the ears, often she was to hear the sisters, highly indignant before her display of pathetic–ness.[177]

This sort of competitive spirituality was frowned upon in the context of the convent: the Benedictine rule was designed to control this very thing. For Clara, the ridicule of the other nuns was a test of faith that she had to overcome.[178] On the other hand, from the

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[175] "De B. Clara Gambacorta," 508. Before joining the Poor Clares, Clara was named Thora. All translations are my own, based on the Latin edition found in the *Acta Sanctorum*.
[176] It is not apparent in the text why her family was so opposed to the Poor Clares but eventually permitted her to join the Dominicans.
[177] "De B. Clara Gambacorta," 510.
[178] On the other hand, her fellow nuns found solidarity through their ridicule of Clara, while the saint herself sought, through her pious practices, sought to separate herself from her

perspective of her fellow nuns, a common enemy gave them an opportunity to find solidarity with each other. This sort of example explains in quite clear terms why monastic rules sought to erode a monk or nun's individuality. What is particularly interesting about Clara's *vita* is that, while the experience of being ridiculed for extreme asceticism may not have been extraordinary for other female saints in general, it is remarkably different from her saintly contemporaries of medieval Italy, be they nuns or laywomen.

On the other hand, in Clara's *vita*, we find quite an elaborate description of a group of female friends who rally around one of their own who found herself in a moment of great need:

> Now several devout women lived in Pisa; among them the oldest one, called Donna Vannuccia, had a granddaughter at her house who was very devout and had taken on the habit of Saint Francis. Another woman lived with them in the house, named Donna Margarita, wife to a certain Dominus Stephanus, a man of strong spirituality and of the best reputation: however the husband of Vannuccia herself was hobbled by a horrible illness, so that he was not able to rise out of bed and all his bones seemed to have dislodged from their place. But just as if this matter were a small thing or nothing in the practicing of love, the aforementioned women received the woman [Vannuccia] into their home, and the man suffering with so horrible an illness, that deep within the chewed–up face no form of eyes appeared anymore, and worms bubbled over out of the rotting cheeks. Those women served this man for the love of God most obediently, and Thora [Clara's original given name], eagerly cultivated their friendship and also she herself began to frequently visit the same sick [man], and to minister to that same man with her own hands, to wipe away the gore, and also to suffer with him from the soul, even to the point of placing her face over the horrendous face of the man, as if desiring to transfer his pain to herself; she delighted in such duties more than other women [delighted in] girlish games.[179]

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religious sisters. This should not necessarily be viewed as an indictment of friendship, other depictions of female fellowship from her *vita* are more positive.

[179]"De B. Clara Gambacorta," 508.

As a girl who was to become a saint, Clara's lack of disgust over this poor man's rotting face was not extraordinary: many a saint kissed a leper, after all. What is intriguing about this episode is that this poor man was not without care and support. Clara was just one of a number of women who took turns caring for him, and she followed the lead of the others. The hagiographer used this episode as evidence of Clara's piety and humility, yet even within the context of the narrative, she does nothing particularly extraordinary, at least in comparison to the good women she had befriended. An element of classical friendship was equality among friends, something that seems to exist among these good laywomen, but is lacking in the convent. Clara finds community and friendship when she is not trying to outdo these women in piousness. These laywomen were not on the path to sainthood, like Clara, but they were examples of good women among whom Clara was exposed to a generosity of spirit. Looked at side by side, these two scenarios could easily appear to be from different *vitae*: one about an independent lay holy woman, like Umiliana de' Cerchi, and the other a more traditional narrative of what constitutes a saintly life. Thus while Kieckhefer has identified this v*ita* as unexceptional, the seeming inconsistencies in Clara's religious experiences suggest that this is rather an interesting example of a hagiographer trying to work out how to present his new–fangled lay saint as relatable to a laywoman yet still exemplary and holy.

One of the prevalent themes running through the *vita* of Margaret of Cortona, meanwhile, was the tension between her desire for solitude and the demands of the secular community in which she lived. In her revelations, God constantly admonished her to withdraw from secular society yet at the same time he prevented her from becoming a complete recluse. So while she was compelled to leave her house – for she had to walk to

church daily– she was supposed to avoid communicating with the people she encountered. For Margaret, this was quite a difficult task. It was not just that she was surrounded by others when out and about, as was the nature of urban life, but she simply could not avoid interacting with her neighbors. For example when she went to the church to pray, she found herself drawn into conversations about secular matters. Of course, medieval society – in small villages as well as in bustling cities – was no place for a person who desired to remain anonymous. Medieval society was by its nature intrusive. The church was as much a place to congregate for gossip and debate as for prayer and worship. Yet such encounters would leave Margaret filled with considerable guilt and shame. Her *vita* described that she would attempt to avoid speaking or even gazing at anyone on her way to and from church, but "[i]f it happened that during the day she heard or talked about worldly matters to secular people, she did not, during the night, dare to seek her usual comfort in prayer from Christ, but rather she would spend a sleepless night weeping in sorrow"[180]

Part of Margaret's problem was her own popularity; the women of Cortona could not seem to get enough of her. At church, she found herself surrounded by women who, while devoted to her, could not seem to stop talking, perhaps on account of their natural feminine propensity to be chatty, as contemporary observers would have explained it, but also in accordance with typical social patterns among medieval urban women.[181] In realization of her obvious weakness at avoiding the company of secular people, Margaret begged the Lord to permit her to never leave her house, but he refused to ease this burden,

[180] Bevegnati, *The Life and Miraces of Saint Margaret of Cortona*, 54-55.
[181] Conversations happened when people congregated, but we also might surmise that women whose primary responsibilities were relegated to the home might have been more inclined to take such opportunities to socialize.

ordering her to go daily to church, and so Margaret had to continue to struggle with what seemed to be her natural instinct to communicate with others.

Had the Lord granted Margaret's wish, her problem would hardly have been solved, as her neighbors were all too eager to visit her. As was noted in the previous chapter, Margaret could not seem to escape the generosity of her zealous neighbors. Two instances in her *vita* demonstrate her impossible position when local women arrived on her doorstep to bring her food. A close examination of how the events are described, however, demonstrate that it was not the weakness in the face of extreme fasting that truly challenged Margaret, but the arrival of her kindly neighbors on her doorstep. Like others of her ilk, Margaret was driven to severe fasting, and evidently the lack of nourishment was taking a visible toll on her body. In one instance, a few local ladies brought her a dish of cooked figs without salt or oil; at least these ladies tried to respect Margaret's austerity. Having eaten a few of the figs, under pressure from the ladies' "persistent and importunate requests," Margaret asked the ladies to leave, so she could figure out if consuming these figs was acceptable or a moment of weakness, in light of the "mandate [she received] from Christ that from time to time she should eat to sustain herself."[182]

In another incident, during Lent, a woman brought to Margaret parboiled cabbages. Again, at the insistence of this woman, Margaret took a few bites of the offered food, but this time she was struck with a violent stomachache. Christ was not so sympathetic in this situation, although not in the way one might assume, admonishing Margaret, "My daughter,

[182] Bevegnati, *The Life and Miraces of Saint Margaret of Cortona*, 76.The Lord's solution was for the Franciscans whose protection she was under to hire a woman to care for Margaret's physical needs. But Christ instructed Margaret to "take care not to look at her face when she comes to you or speaks with you."

if you are not strong enough to endure yourself and an upset stomach impedes the motion of your heart, how shall I communicate my presence to you?" It is not Margaret's weakness in accepting the offered food that has upset the Lord, but her inability to stomach it. Thus, he permitted her to eat some more "delicate" food – meaning food that was better prepared, perhaps with some oil and seasoning – since her stomach was so weakened on account of her fasting. Eventually, with considerable reluctance, she opted to put some oil on her vegetables.[183] While this scene highlights the physical challenges of extreme fasting, this is yet another lapse brought on by concerned neighbors.

Poor Margaret time and time again found herself in situations that required personal interactions, but she was called on by her Lord to remain as impersonal as possible in a very social world. The intention of both of these scenes was to illustrate Margaret's challenges with abstinence, and poor Margaret seems to find it particularly difficult to balance the needs of her body, her guilt over the consumption of food, and her desire to fast. Yet this challenge was made even more difficult by her well–intentioned neighbors, women who were in no way trying to sabotage Margaret's religious ambitions, since the food they bring to her (unseasoned figs and parboiled cabbage) could hardly be considered "delicate." These were women who respected and admired the blessed woman in their midst, who showed concern over her physical well–being, and tried to assist Margaret who, despite her state of starvation, accepted their food largely to be polite. She did not want to offend her friends and neighbors by refusing to accept their food, or by not trying their offered dishes in their presence. While other scenes describe Margaret accepting food only to give it to the poor, in both these scenes the women insist that

[183] Ibid., 80.

Margaret eat the food that they have brought her. Thus, while her grief and physical reaction seems to be brought on the consumption of these dishes, Margaret only eats because it would be rude not to do so.

For Margaret refusing to talk or associate with other women was yet another form of abstinence, which suggests that for her female friendships, or at least interactions with other women, were a significant source of pleasure in her life. Here it is worth comparing Margaret of Cortona to Umiliana de' Cerchi, who had at least three close friends and was not at all troubled by her enjoyment of the pleasures of friendship. Umiliana simply did not have this issue of well–intentioned women trying to provide her sustenance, or least there is no evidence of such a dilemma in her v*ita*. Indeed beyond commenting on her fasting, the hagiographer says nothing about how her physical needs were met. Margaret of Cortona's *vita* was comprised largely of what the holy woman recounted to her confessor, with him sometimes even quoting her in first person, while Umiliana's confessor composed her *vita* after she had died. Thus in the *vita* of Margaret we find much more information about the saint's daily struggles of living an ascetic life surrounded by secular female society; these details may have seemed of considerable importance to her, and so worth recounting them to her confessor. Such challenges may not have even occurred to a hagiographer composing the *vita* of his subject after her death and distanced from her day–to–day challenges. A male hagiographer may not have understood the intense delight provided by female company, and so may not have thought of its sacrifice as a form of asceticism. In traditional male–composed hagiographies of the period, the holy women all sought to fast in extreme ways or isolate themselves from society, but most often this challenge was internal. For Margaret of Cortona, whose *vita* was related by the saint herself, her challenges pertaining to

extreme asceticism were much more social, such as what to do when your neighbor brings you food, or people want to speak to you in church.[184] These were social challenges that took on a spiritual meaning when the subject was a holy person, but they also paint for us a vivid picture of women's communities in a medieval Italian city. Just as we see in the incident in the v*ita* of Clara in which she joined a group of women caring for the very sick husband of one of their own, Margaret was naturally part of a network of female neighbors who took the time to care for each other, suggesting that such informal communities of women were an ever–present and sometimes a very necessary part of a woman's urban environment and day–to–day life. And from Margaret's point of view, these daily, regular interactions with the women of her neighborhood and parish were cause for significant spiritual upheaval and doubt: an essential challenge she must fight and overcome to become blessed and special in the eyes of God. Finally, it is important to repeat that these neighborly women bringing her cabbage or seeking conversation were not depicted as led by the devil or intentionally sabotaging Margaret's mission in their actions. This simply and significantly emphasizes that Margaret really struggled in a uniquely gendered way with how to be pious and navigate common, daily interactions. Her *vita* describes a world full of interactions among women, which may have provided a challenge to our saint, but were not necessarily problematic in general. While we see this challenge to the woman herself most explicitly in the *vita* of Margaret, we can hypothesize that other holy women also might have sought to separate themselves from the intimate nature of female urban society. Aspects of our *vitae* support this hypothesis. In the *vita* of Umiliana, her old friend

[184] In this respect, Margaret of Cortona is comparable to Margery of Kent, another woman whose life story – in her case recounted in first person – is also replete with the day to day challenges of being a holy–minded lay woman.

and sister–in–law Ravenna disappeared from her day–to–day life as Umiliana became increasingly devout. The female relationships that she and other saints did develop were with other women who, while not so special to be deemed saints, were at least also pursuing a holy life. Thus, even when it was not explicitly stated in the various *vitae*, some degree of isolation in the midst of community was apparently necessary for female urban piety. The many references to female fellowship in the *vita* of Margaret of Cortona suggest that for some holy women this was deemed a real sacrifice, as challenging and meaningful as denying oneself sufficient food.[185]

Community in the Convent

While many holy women of this period preferred to practice their piety independently of any monastic order, entrance into a convent certainly remained an option, whether in long standing monastic institutions or houses associated with the Franciscans and Dominicans. But among those women of our period who chose this more traditional spiritual avenue, many took indirect routes to their final home. Many holy women of this period eventually chose the convent after spending most of their lives in the secular world (and so shared many experiences with independent holy women) or transitioned to the monastic life after a period of living as a tertiary. As mentioned above, Clara Gambacorta first tried to run to the Poor Clares (who threw her out as soon as her domineering family arrived at the gate) before taking the veil as a Dominican nun. Clare of Rimini, discussed in the previous chapter, who also converted to a religious life while still

[185] Angela of Foligno's texts, although not quite a *vita*, discussed further on in this chapter, are also from the perspective of the holy woman, and she also discusses the challenges of female fellowship, albeit in a very different way. Such texts provide rare access into the experiences of these holy women that are not present in traditional *vitae* composed by hagiographers.

married. The life choices of a saint such as Clare might have resonated in particular with married pious laywomen, who could look to them as an exemplar of the piety, even they themselves did not end their days in a convent.

Chiara da Montefalco (d. 1308) began her religious vocation as a tertiary, taking vows only later in life.[186] But unlike many of the holy women of her period, Chiara had pious ambitions from childhood; at six as per her own request she went to join her sister Joanna in a small hermitage that had been established by her father. Later on, Chiara, Joanna, and the other women of the hermitage founded a convent, taking vows under the order of the Augustinians.[187] Despite this entrance into the regular life, both Chiara and Francesca embodied the independent spirit of many of the holy women of this period; when they do enter a convent, it is one of their own founding, in which are housed women already connected to them through family and kinship networks.[188] These women can hardly be said to have abandoned their world. This strategy was the opposite of that of Margaret of Cortona, who withdrew (or at least tried to) from feminine society while remaining "in the world." Rather, for Chiara and Francesca serving God was a group effort. Furthermore, the fact that these institutions were predicated on friendship deviated from the standard fear of friendship in the monastery. Recall that community of like–minded

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[186] For a translation of her *Vita* see: Berengario di Sant'Africano, *Life of Saint Clare of Montefalco*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Villanova: Augustinian Press, 1998). I use the alternate spelling of Chiara as a way to differentiate her more clearly from Clara Gambacorta and Clare of Rimini.

[187] In both instances, we see a holy woman who sought out the companionship of other women, which can certainly be viewed through the lens of friendship!

[188] Poor Clara Gambacorta, on the other hand, although she did rebel against her family, seemed to have lacked an independent streak to the extent of these other two women. Or, alternately their financial resources: although Clara's father might have eventually come around to the prospect of his daughter taking the veil, one can imagine that he was not about to found a convent for her!

friends that Augustine of Hippo established, but which ultimately fell apart? Both Chiara and Francesca managed to do what Augustine could not: use friendship as a way to collectively support each other in establishing and maintaining a life devoted to God. These were friendships that managed to transcend worldly concerns while remaining intact.

Despite the concern about friendship and personal relationships within the monastic setting, it seems simply common sense to assume that affective attachments formed on a fairly regular basis. Still, it is of interest when such relationships are detailed in the *vitae* of these saintly nuns. Even though monastic rules sought to limit personal connections, when hagiographers describe these evidently close and personal relationships, they do so without explanation or question. Perhaps while concerns over personal relationships were found within the *regulae*, in reality individual friendships amongst nuns or monks were an accepted part of cloistered living. One saintly nun from our period whose v*ita* contains descriptions of her personal relationships is Agnes of Montepulciano (d. 1317).[189] Agnes, like Chiara da Montefalco, was a child wonder, entering a convent at the age of nine. At the age of thirteen she helped to found a new monastery of which she became prioress only two years later. Raymond of Capua, who would later become the confessor and advisor to Catherine of Siena, composed her *vita*. Agnes's convent experience was much different from Clara of Gambacorta's; she was respected by her religious sisters, and instead of mocking Agnes's penitential activities, they implored her to take better care of herself. While her entire community was described as rallying

[189] For a recent edited edition see: Raymond of Capua, *Legenda Beate Agnetis De Monte Polciano* (Florence: Tavarnuzze 2001). For the English translation cited here see: *The Life of Saint Agnes of Montepulciano*, trans. Sister Mary Martin Jacobs, OP (Summit, NJ: Dominican Nuns of Summit, 2012).

behind the saint, two of Agnes's fellow nuns were singled out a number of times throughout her v*ita*: Sister Margaret and Sister Catharina. When Agnes first entered the convent, she was handed over to the care of Sister Margaret, who was "swept away" after witnessing the young girl's humility and obedience, becoming a great admirer of Agnes. When Margaret was sent by Pope Nicholas IV to help found a new monastery at Proceno, she refused to go unless accompanied by Agnes. Raymond of Capua described the two women setting off as if departing on a marvelous journey together: "They both (that is, Margaret and Agnes) ran equally to the work of God, carrying it out vigorously, but Agnes ran faster, that is, more perfectly than Margaret," a gentle reminder to the reader that one of these woman was destined to be a saint and so must be superior in every way.[190] The other Sister who pops up more than once in the v*ita,* Sister Catharina, had joined the community at Proceno, and often served as a witness to Agnes's sanctity, alongside the rest of the unnamed Sisters. In the narrative, Catharina was singled–out by the hagiographer as being particularly close to the saint. Thus, when Agnes cried out during a mystical experience, the sisters came running to find out what was the matter. In her vision, Agnes was clinging to Jesus as a lamb, but when the Holy Virgin wanted her son back, she ripped him out of Agnes's arms after a brief struggle, thus causing Agnes to cry out in sorrow. Agnes only revealed these details to Catharina, described in the *vita* as "greatly loved by her [Agnes] for her holy and religious life."[191] Catharina was evidently older than Agnes, as was suggested in another scene. In this case, "when she was still a small child in the monastery," Agnes heard the crying of small children outside begging for bread. Agnes approached Catharina "who was beloved to her and demanded that she give the children bread."

[190] *The Life of Saint Agnes of Montepulciano*, 18.
[191] Ibid., 28.

Catharina told Agnes there was no bread to give, but Agnes demanded she check again, and when Catherina checked the breadbox, low and behold, it was filled with bread, enough for the children and the sisters of the monastery.[192] Margaret and Catharina stand out in the life of Agnes for a number of reasons: they were named by the hagiographer instead of simply referred to as a fellow sister and they made repeat appearances in the narrative. Although the difference in ages is not give, both Margaret and Catharina appear to have been older than Agnes, suggesting that their relationship to the saint had a maternal quality to it. Margaret, recall, was Agnes's first care provider upon her entrance to the convent, and so in their relationship we see the model of spiritual friendship as described by Anselm subverted – Agnes, originally the student, surpassed her teacher.

Raymond of Capua wrote this *Vita* at least fifty years after Agnes' death in 1317; he did not personally know Agnes. In the Prologue, he wrote of "four religious sisters who are still alive today, who were well acquainted with her [Agnes] from her earliest youth." Raymond was the rector of the Dominican nuns of Montepulciano from 1363–1367, a half–century after Agnes died, so his witnesses must have been quite elderly at the time of his inquiries or very young when they bore witness to Agnes' piety.[193] Furthermore, they were not necessarily eyewitnesses to they events the related. Thus, in the middle of the *Vita*, we come across this passage:

> The above–mentioned sisters [presumably the four nuns noted in the Prologue], my relaters and informants, bear witness that they had heard these things from her

[192] Ibid., 41. The timeline is rather unclear, since Catharina joined the new house at Proceno, thus when this incident took place, Agnes had to have been at least thirteen, hardly a little girl. But when it came to *vitae*, chronology was not always the most significant detail.
[193] Ibid., 5.

> [Agnes's] own mouth, that she had told it about herself as if it were someone else, that they had heard them obscurely from her but clearly from those sisters who were with her at the time.[194]

Elsewhere, Raymond notes that a certain story about Agnes had been recounted to his informants by Catharina.[195] He depended on the stories remembered about Agnes by others in the community, so even though Margaret and Catharina had no special status outside of their closeness to the saint, these relationships remained part of the communal memory of Agnes's life. Neither Agnes's fellow nuns nor those who came after her and looked back on her life fondly regarded these friendships with either jealousy or contempt, even though they indicate that the saint favored some over others. We might even speculate that accounts of other nuns who may have remembered more turbulence or conflicts stemming from these relationships were left out of the narrative by Raymond. The hagiographer in this case considered these positive depictions of friendship a worthy characteristic of a woman whom he held up as a saint.

A Female Confidante

One role played by female friends in the *vitae* discussed in the previous chapter was that of confidante. Umiliana de Cerchi had a few acquaintances who fit the bill, in particular her fellow recluse Sobilia, who appears in the *Vita* as almost a spiritual equal, though the women could not have been true equals, of course, as only one ultimately became a saint. In the *vita* of Agnes of Montepulciano, the older sister Catharina was the one to whom the saint recounted the details of her visions. A very interesting example of the role of the

[194] Ibid., 29.
[195] Ibid., 41.

female confidante appears in the works of Angela of Foligno (1248–1309). The earliest *vita* we have for Angela is from the seventeenth–century – earlier narratives on which it was based have disappeared – but Angela was responsible for two works documenting her mystical experiences, the *Memorial* and the *Instructions*.[196] As was common practice during that era, both texts were attributed to Angela, although they were dictated to scribes.[197] The *Memorial* recounts Angela's spiritual experience and the scribe was her confessor, a Brother Arnaldo of whom little is known. The *Instructions* consists of letters sent to a group of Franciscan brothers.

Angela of Foligno was similar to many other saints considered here. A woman from a well–to–do Umbrian family, she married and had children, before undergoing a spiritual conversion in 1285, when she was around 40 years of age. She claimed to have fallen into sin prior to her conversion, but provided no details, perhaps simply referring to the enjoyment she took from married life. After her conversion, looking back at her transformation from sinner to penitent, Angela identified thirty steps of penance that she went through; these steps are laid out in the *Memorial.* According to Angela, the ninth step

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[196] For a recent critical edition of Angela's writings see: Angela da Foligno, *Memoriale* (Florence: SISMEL, 2013). For an English translation see: Angela of Foligno, *Complete Works*, trans. Paul Lachance (New York Paulist Press, 1993). Angela was declared Blessed in 1701, and finally canonized in 2013.

[197] The actual texts of both male and female authors were often put in writing by scribes, regardless of whether the actual author had the skill to write or not. Thus, there is always a question of the extent to which the scribe influenced the work. For the role of the scribe in Angela's works, see the Part II "The Formation of Angela's Book" of the introduction to her *Complete Works.* See also: Phyllis Culham, "Gender and Negotiating Discourse: Mediated Autobiography and Female Mystics of Medieval Italy," in *Sex and Gender in Medieval and Renaissance Texts: The Latin Tradition*, ed. Barbara K. Gold, Paul Allen Miller, and Charles Platter (Albany: State University of New York, 1997); Catherine M. Mooney, ed. *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999); and John Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power: Female Saints and Their Male Collaborators* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006)

entailed "stripping myself of everything worldly, of all attachments to men and women, of my friends and relatives, and everyone else, and, likewise, of my possessions and even my very self. Then I would be free to give my heart to Christ . . ."[198] Yet Angela did not remove herself from the company of all friends; while her family helpfully died, she maintained a close relationship with a woman named Masazuola. Masazuola acted like many of the companions of saints reviewed in the previous chapter. For example, she often was in the position of having to save the saint from herself, much to the great annoyance of Angela. Angela explained how she would become sick with fever whenever she saw an image of the Passion, and so Masazuola hid them from her. She also became annoyed with Masazuola when the companion came upon Angela while the saint was in the middle of a mystical experience. When Masazuola found Angela collapsed on the ground, she thought her ill or dead, and so interrupted her "in that very great consolation."[199] But the relationship between Masazuola and Angela was much more complex; unlike in the many other friendships found in these *vitae*, we also glimpse some conflict in their relationship. For Angela, overcoming these conflicts added to her pious growth. A significant difference in the type of conflict that Margaret of Cortona and Angela experienced in regards to female companionship is that Margaret, for all her encounters with other women, did not seem to have a best friend or particularly close companion, like Angela had in Masazuola. Furthermore, while Margaret's solution was to try to isolate – or at least limit – herself from any female society, for Angela it was important to work through the challenges and conflicts of that arose in the context of this close relationship. The idea that there is

[198] *Complete Works*, 126.
[199] Ibid., 131.

something wrong with a holy woman such as herself having such a close friendship does not arise at all in her writings.

Angela stated at the beginning of the *Memorial* that she developed her thirty steps of penance during conversations she had with Masazuola about God. Her companion was not just someone who made sure the saint ate, or simply acted as a witness to her mystical experiences. She did all that, of course, but in addition Masazuola was a central figure in the relationship between Angela and God. Thus, for example, Masazuola recounted to the scribe, Brother Arnaldo, that she was woken up by a voice telling her " 'The Holy Spirit is within Lella [Angela's nickname].' " When Masazuola told this to Angela, the saint was very pleased and "from then on Christ's faithful one [Angela] communicated many divine secrets to her companion." [200] Brother Arnaldo used this story as evidence of the truth of Angela's saintliness, and indeed he turned to Masazuola a number of times while producing the *Memorial* for her input into Angela's behavior. After Angela tried to explain to Arnaldo what the experience of the soul knowing or joining with God is like, he sought Masazuola for her take, Angela having revealed that she was unable to hide such moments from her companions. Masazuola told Arnaldo that:

> . . .once while she and Angela were walking together along a road, the countenance of Christ's faithful one became white and radiant, then ruddy and joyful, and her eyes grew large and shone so brilliantly that she no longer seemed herself. This same companion also told me: "When I saw Angela in this state I was filled with sadness and feared that someone, a man or a woman, would meet us and notice her in this state. I told Angela, 'Why don't you at least try to cover your face? Your eyes seem to shine like candles.'" This companion, because she was shy and very simple, and still did not know all the gifts of grace Angela had been granted, then began to lament and beat her breasts with fists, and said to Christ's faithful one: "Tell me why

[200] Ibid., 144.

> this is happening to you? Try to get out of sight or hide yourself somewhere, for we cannot walk around if you are in such a state." Out of her simplicity and ignorance she then cried out: "Woe is me, what are we going to do?" Christ's faithful one, for her part, trying to console and reassure her, told her: "Do not fear, for even if we meet someone, God will help us." This happened not only once but so many times that her companion said she could not count them.

This provides a number of insights into the relationship between Angela the saint and Masazuola the companion. Even though Masazuola herself had been told by the voice of God that Angela was special, and she had witnessed Angela in moments of spiritual ecstasy on a number of occasions, this intensity of spirit was simply not something she was able to comprehend or fully get used to. Brother Arnaldo describes Masazuola as simple, and a translator of this work, Paul Lachance, assumes that she was initially a domestic servant who became Angela's confidante over time. Masazuola seems to have been with Angela from before her conversion, so we could imagine that perhaps she had been a family servant from Angela's days as a wealthy married woman. Regardless of how Masazuola entered the picture, the relationship between her and Angela reads as one of close friends and constant companions, rather than mistress and servant. Indeed, in one letter to the Franciscan brothers in *Instructions*, Angela used herself and Masazuola as a model for what the brothers should strive for. In Instruction IX, likely in response to letters concerning factions in the Franciscan order, Angela wrote to the brothers, encouraging them to overcome their differences in order to serve God more fully: "I desire for you what I desire for my companion and myself, that you always be of one mind and that there be no divisions among you." She advised them not to think of themselves as self–sufficient, and instead to perceive themselves as humble and little, so as to create unity and diffuse

contention.[201] Elsewhere in the text Angela indicated that she herself had to work hard for the type of unity and humility she urged on the friars: in Instruction XVII she admitted to feeling envy towards Masazuola at times, "when I believe she is more united to God than I."[202] Furthermore, even though Brother Arnaldo described Masazuola as simple and he himself was Angela's confessor, it was to her female companion that Angela confided when facing uncertainty.

While Angela herself raised concerns about her piety in comparison to her companion Masazuola, hagiographers did not display such doubts about their subjects. Thus, to point to one example, we have Raymond of Capua's insistence that Margaret, while a devout woman, is nothing compared to his subject, Agnes of Montepulciano ("Agnes ran faster, that is, more perfectly than Margaret")[203]. Perhaps Raymond felt the need to emphasize the superiority of his subject above all others, and leave no doubt in the reader's mind who was worthy of sanctity? As with the largely auto–biographical *vita* of Margaret of Cortona, in the writings of Angela we get to see what most concerned the holy woman herself, rather than a hagiographer who may be trying to present his subject in a particular light. Thus in the *vita* of Margaret of Cortona, told from her own perspective, we see her daily concerns about how to navigate interactions with her neighbors, and in her own writings Angela revealed her doubts about her own worthiness. What seems relevant and acceptable to her internal spiritual journey, at least in these instances, seems different from the point of view of the holy woman herself than from her hagiographer.

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[201] Ibid., 263.
[202] Ibid., 270.
[203] Capua, *The Life of Saint Agnes of Montepulciano*, 18.

The Unique Case of Benvenuta Bojani and her Most Special Friends

Almost all of the holy women examined here have had at least one spiritual side–kick on their quest for piety: Bona of Pisa was accompanied on every journey by Gaitiana; Umiliana de' Cerchi found fellowship with another lay holy woman Sobilia but always had in her heart her sister–in–law Ravenna; Angela of Foligno had the ever-present Masazuola, and Agnes of Montepulciano had as confidantes Catharina and Margaret. Our exceptions are Margaret of Cortona and Clara of Gambacorta, for whom other women presented a problem and a challenge, albeit in different ways, and Clare of Rimini, for whom no particular woman stands out in her *Vita* as filling the role of confidante, although she surrounded herself with like–minded women. In the unique life of Benvenuta Bojani, unlike the other holy women I have discussed whose companions are but a small part of the story, friendship is a uniquely significant aspect of her holiness.

Benvenuta Bojani (d. 1292) was a Dominican tertiary in her hometown of Cividale, Friuli.[204] Unlike Margaret, Umiliana, or Bona, Benvenuta lived in a community resembling a traditional convent; she was not a full–fledged nun, but perhaps lived in a situation similar to the community founded by Clare of Rimini. Benvenuta's life was extraordinary, even (or perhaps especially) for a saint, for a number of reasons. In the first place, she appears to have had a happy childhood and a father supportive of her vocation. Truly a miracle! As she was the last of seven daughters, at her birth no one wanted to reveal to her father that his wife had borne him yet another girl, but when he eventually found out, "he responded

[204] For her *Vita* see: "Vita Devotissimae Benevenutae De Foro-Julii." All translations are my own.

with a joyous and loud voice: 'and this is well come so she will be called Benvenuta.'"[205] Of course for Benvenuta a happy childhood meant spending it in prayer, and while she insisted, in good saintly fashion, in keeping her devotion under wraps, when she begged her father that she be free to lead her angelic life, he does not appear to have minded much.[206] On the other hand, perhaps Signor Bojana was accustomed to religious devotion in his children, as Benvenuta appears to have followed in the footsteps of an elder sister in desiring a religious life, much like Chiara of Montefalco followed her elder sister Joanna.[207] Both during Benvenuta's life and after her death through miraculous interventions, Benvenuta was described as having numerous interactions with women, both inside her religious community and from the local lay population. However, four of her religious sisters were identified by the hagiography specifically as *amicae* (friends) and it is clear from the text that some of these friendships were especially close; while two fellow nuns, Sister Nicholotta and Sister Mathilda, were described as merely her special friends – *speciales amicae* – her sister Maria and another fellow nun Margareta are both described as her most special – *specialissimae* – friends. As discussed in the first chapter, one of the challenges to finding evidence or discussions of female friendship in medieval sources is the question of language, and the *vitae* are no exception. Indeed the words *amica* or *amicitia* are not used in any of the *vitae* that I have discussed thus far in relation to female

[205] Ibid., 152.
[206] Interestingly, while Benvenuta's father is a major figure in her *vita*, there is no mention of her mother. I am inclined to speculate that her mother died, which adds a further dimension to the close relationship between Benvenuta and her sister Maria, discussed further below.
[207] Furthermore, Signor Bojana was probably relieved not have had to come up with a dowry and find a husband for yet another daughter! That she wanted to be a tertiary, rather than a full-fledged nun, probably made this choice particularly economical, since many convents required dowries.

friendships; the reader must parse the nature of these relationships from context. Thus the *Vita* of Benvenuta provides us with a noteworthy exception, in which numerous and explicit – and carefully calibrated – descriptions of friendship are to be found. While it is not clear if the hagiographer knew Benvenuta personally, it seems from the text that the hagiographer was at least acquainted with those who had known her.[208] Just as in the *vita* of Agnes of Montepulciano, Benvenuta's friendships had become part of the communal memory of the holy woman.

One *specialis amica* of Benvenuta's was Sister Nicholotta, who first appeared in the *Vita* during an account of one of Benvenuta's experiences of spiritual rapture, which was witnessed by seven or eight of her sisters one morning following breakfast:

> And when the Sisters were amazed standing before her, in so great and so excellent a miraculous change, after some time her own spirit returned, the usual color of her face being returned to her. And when the prioress and Sister Nicholotta, who was her special friend, asked of her, where she had been, and what she had seen, with great shyness she responded and begged, that they not trouble her with these kinds of questions.[209]

After Benvenuta's death, Sister Nicholotta was one of three Sisters who witnessed her first post–mortem miracle:

> For she was buried on the vigil of All Saints, and in the night following, because of strong rain, three Regular Sisters of ours, who were held back in the monastery of the Sisters of the City, namely Sister Nicholotta, who recently became prioress, Sister Margareta and Sister Magdalena, saw great lights shining, for most of the

[208] The hagiographer is anonymous, but I like to speculate that it might have been a fellow tertiary sister, albeit not one who had been closely acquainted with Benvenuta or had even known her personally.
[209] "Vita Devotissimae Benevenutae De Foro-Julii," 171.

night, in front of the church above the tomb of Benvenuta, which is located before the doorway of the church.[210]

Perhaps Sister Nicholotta was granted this sight because she was a special friend of Benvenuta's. In any case, certainly the hagiographer took care in pointing out the Sisters who were particular friends of Benvenuta.

Two friends who appeared repeatedly throughout the *Vita* were Maria, Benvenuta's sister, and Sister Margareta, whom Benvenuta met when she first entered the monastery. The hagiographer at one point described Sister Margareta as a "most special friend" to Benvenuta, and we are provided with many details of their relationship.[211] When Margareta is first introduced by the hagiographer, it was as a valiant protector to Benvenuta:

> It happened moreover that [Benvenuta] remaining there was weakened by continuous fevers, and the other sisters, who were more partial toward her, for pity's sake, demanded they stay with her in the house where she was lingering, that they might console her, and help her in her necessities. Among whom especially was the virgin Margareta, noble in birth but more noble in her humility, who just as she went out during the day, during the night she remained clothed and with her shoes on, in her service, not having her own bed to lie on; but if she wanted to rest at some point she laid herself on the floorboards, reclining her head on the bed of the infirmed.
>
> Now an evil spirit, who at other times had become accustomed to molesting Benvenuta, came to the bed in which she lay with the aforesaid sisters, and by striking and terrorizing, and others ways to such a degree she was molested by him, that he put himself on the shoulders of sister Margareta and began vehemently to push her down, and she [Margareta] began to curse him, saying "Evil spirit, I curse you by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and by the merit of this saintly

[210] Ibid., 176.
[211] Ibid., 170.

> women [Benvenuta], that you leave me in peace," and then having departed from her, making a noise, as if a great weight had fallen from the upper balcony, a second and third time he climbed on her and fell again, this same woman guarding herself with similar words.[212]

The second paragraph of the above passage is quite fascinating, as it was not the saint who has been granted the power to shoo away the devil, but her friend. One might compare this scene to that in the *Vita* of Umiliana, where the saint must intervene on behalf of her friend Gisla, who was plagued by the devil making noise. Indeed, when reading the lives of these holy women, one is often struck by the question of why is the subject of the *vita* the one who is designated a saint? What, in the end, made Margareta less blessed than Benvenuta, or Umiliana more saintly than her friend or confidant Sobilia? The women whom these saints chose to befriend appear to have been women who were almost their spiritual equals. Benvenuta, Umiliana, Angela, and Agnes all found spiritual strength through close relationships with particularly pious women. This is another reason why the *vitae* of Margaret of Cortona and Clara Gambacorta, really stand out from others of the same period: most other female saints surrounded themselves with exceptionally pious women. The presence of other pious women may have served two potential purposes. Such women provided a check on the saint's pride. We see this most blatantly in the experiences of Angela and her companion Masazuola, whose piety caused Angela to doubt herself. According to standard medieval thinking, women were particularly predisposed to vanity, so perhaps the holy women and their hagiographers sought to avoid any such accusations (Clara Gambacorta excluded, of course). Even Margaret of Cortona was humbled through

[212] Ibid., 158-59.

her acceptance of food from her concerned neighbors. Further puposes for surrounding the saint with like–minded pious women may have been both an acknowledgement of the importance of female community in the lives of urban Italian women, and a call for female readers, for whom these independent holy women in particular were intended as models, to seek out the company of other good women. Indeed, a particular narrative that we do not see in these *vitae* is the saint pulling another out of sin, perhaps reflecting a concern lest good, well–to–do women expose themselves to the less desirable members of society. This concern makes sense in medieval society in which women were thought to be more easily influenced and, especially, corrupted than men. Perhaps this held true for even the best and pious of women.

In the *vita* of Benvenuta Margareta was more often on the receiving end of the saint's aid. Sometimes this involved serious problems, where Margareta's life might have been in danger. For example, Benvenuta loosened a belt that had somehow been wrapped around Margareta too tightly (the details are sketchy) and cured her of a grave illness.[213] While another miracle performed on Margareta's behalf seemed almost frivolous:

> Now Sister Margareta had one natural weakness, that she was not able to eat cheese for the entire time of her life, nor any dish, in which cheese had been placed; lastly if the spoon with which she was obliged to eat had touched another dish, in which cheese had been placed, [and] afterwards that spoon touched the food which she was obliged to eat, at once she sensed it, and was not able to eat, and if she did eat, she threw up. Also her father had this weakness, because he was never able to eat cheese.[214]

[213] Ibid., 159-60.
[214] Ibid., 160.

Benvenuta was able to cure this "weakness" through taking a piece of cheese in her hand and making the sign of the cross over it; after eating that piece, Margareta was able to eat cheese for the rest of her life.

Benvenuta also helped her friend in a way that might seem peculiar for a saint, especially if we compare her to a saint like Clara Gambacorta, who earned the animosity of her sisters because of her ascetic behavior. One would assume that a saint would be appalled to discover that one of her fellow sisters was skipping one of the divine offices, but when Margaret slept in, missing matins, Benvenuta made sure her best friend did not get into trouble, through taking advantage of their similar appearance:

> Sister Margareta, on the third day of the feast of Pentecost, since she did not hear the signal for matins, she was missing from matins with the Sisters, [but there was someone] in the choir and in her seat, in all respects similar in the stature, in the dress, and in the voice of Sister Margareta, fulfilling the duties which Sister Margaret was responsible to do. However, towards the end of the day, Sister Margaret began to complain, and to feel ashamed, and to be more than a little sorry, that on a such great feast she had not be in matins with the others. Truly the other sisters contradicted her, [saying] that she had been in matins, and that they saw her reading and singing, and doing the whole office. However with Sister Margareta firmly denying, [saying] that she had not been, and with the others in turn affirming the contrary, they all began to be more than a little surprised. However, the greatest reason that Sister Margareta grieved that she not been in matins was Benvenuta, because she was strongly devoted to her, and her most special friend, lest by chance because of this failing there should be some murmuring against Benvenuta.

While the sisters eventually realized what must have happened – that Benvenuta pretended to be Margareta so that latter would not get in any trouble – Benvenuta continued to maintain her silence on the issue, and when asked directly responded, smiling,

that "I have done greater things for Sister Margareta."[215] While clearly Benvenuta was trying to teach Margareta a lesson, this lesson could only work because of their friendship, and indeed this is what the hagiographer was stressing in this episode. In this lesson, Benvenuta took on the role of spiritual guide imperative to Aelred's model of spiritual friendship. [216]

Margareta had another role in her friendship with Benvenuta, that of confidante, which in this case meant being party to some of Benvenuta's most intense spiritual experiences. As her two closest friends, both her sister Maria and Margareta were often present for Benvenuta's mystical experiences. While others at times also witnessed Benvenuta's ecstatic behavior, what set Maria and Margareta apart is that they are allowed more knowledge and comprehension of what took place than the other sisters. Maria and Margareta (separately, on each occasion) fell asleep in Benvenuta's bedroom, only to waken when they heard her having a strange conversation. Margareta could hear the voice of Benvenuta and that of the person she was speaking to but she was not able to comprehend the words, nor see the other speaker. In the morning, Margareta asked her what was said, and Benvenuta told her (the reader, unfortunately, does not learn what was said). In a similar episode Maria heard and understood the words of Benvenuta, but could not hear the other person: Maria heard her sister giving thanks, presumably to the Virgin Mary.[217] That these women shared in the saint's mystical experiences – and, the text

[215]Ibid., 170.
[216] On the other hand, the hagiographer might have been thinking of the many miracles of the Marian tradition, where the Virgin takes the place of a monk so he does not get in trouble. However, even so, the friendship between Benvenuta and Margareta is still an essential element of this version of the story.
[217]"Vita Devotissimae Benevenutae De Foro-Julii," 159.

suggests, on many occasions – reflected their own great piety. Margareta was granted even more special insight into her friend's spirituality: in another incident, Margareta joined Benvenuta in an all–night vigil, during which Benvenuta had another mystical experience. By this time, Margareta was used to such things happening, for she realized when Benvenuta's spirit returned to her "because she knew by her [Benvenuta's] deep breaths, which she had become accustomed to happening whenever [Benvenuta's] spirit returned." After coming out of her trance, Benvenuta complained to Margareta that she was thirsty, but refused either the wine or water that was offered, saying that is was too late for wine and that she did not want Margareta going off alone to the well. They argued about this, and a struggle ensued, which ended when Benvenuta kissed Margareta, and Margareta had her own ecstatic experience:

> . . . [Margareta] at once from the touch and breath of her [Benvenuta] felt such great sweetness of comfort that it was seen be her, that all the pleasures and comforts of her life could not be compared with such great pleasures and such great comforts; and scarcely could she know, if there could be greater comfort in happiness because it was seen by her, that before happiness and comfort and joyfulness the soul wished to exit the body. To sleep, to drink, to eat, and all other comforts of this life with respect of that body were seen to be punishments.[218]

What sets the *vita* of Benvenuta apart from the others of the period is that these close, intimate friendships were a not just fundamental aspect of her sanctity, but were explicitly labeled as friendship. In no other *vitae* from this period, or in any others I have encountered from medieval Europe, of either men or women, is friendship so clearly marked in the language used, or dramatized in such a vivid fashion. In this respect, this is a

[218] Ibid. 159. The description of Margareta's spiritual enlightenment continues for several more lines.

v*ita* rare within the hagiographical tradition as a whole. But with little knowledge of the hagiographer, one can only speculate regarding the reasons for the inclusion of these detailed depictions of particular friendship, and the explicit use of the word *amica.*[219]

While the *Vita* of Benvenuta may have been an outlier, for female, urban saints, regardless of whether they lived independently or joined some sort of religious community, the company and support of other women was an integral part of urban life, which they carried over into their spiritual practice. While the *Vitae* of both Margaret of Cortona and Clara Gambacorta presented friendship and female fellowship as problematic, such instances were still integral to the piety of these women. Furthermore, when we consider Clara Gambacorta, it was only once she entered a traditional convent that her *Vita* became increasingly conventional and female fellowship disappeared as an element. Whether other women offered the saint material or emotional support, or acted as confidantes and partners in piety, the networks of women through which these holy persons circulated were intended to reflect the lives of regular laywomen for whom these saints were presented as models. As such, these *vitae*, with their sometimes–vivid depictions of friendship and female sociability, give to historians not just insight into the saintly but also

[219] Benvenuta was beatified in 1763. Interestingly the biographical blurbs about her found in the various online collections of saints make no reference of her friendships, rather focusing on her more "traditional" saintly aspects such as her extreme penance and bouts with the devil.

the everyday lives of medieval Italian urban women, in particular the importance of female friendship.

Chapter IV: Civil Friendship: A New Model for Friendship

In *La Vita Nuova*, Dante experienced an obstacle in approaching the girl he desired that many a teenage boy would appreciate: Beatrice was never alone, but always accompanied by chaperones or surrounded by her friends. Take, for instance, Dante's description of a marriage scene where the bride's friends, including his beloved Beatrice, join her for a meal after the ceremony. Dante describes that "according to the custom of the city, it was their [the bride's companions] duty to keep her company on the first occasion when she sat down at table in the house of her bridegroom."[220] Dante was dragged to the festivities by his own friend to pay service to the bride and her companions. Dante's vision of Florentine society was one divided by gender, thus at the wake of Beatrice's father: "Since it is the custom in the city I have mentioned for women to foregather with women and men with men on such sad occasions, a number of women met together where Beatrice was weeping piteously"[221] For a well–to–do young woman residing in the fourteenth–century Florence, the company of other women was integral to her social and civil life. Urban life in the Italian city–states of the thirteenth– and fourteenth–centuries certainly provided women with opportunities for friendship and fellowship. But friendship within the context of city living, for women as for men, was more than a pleasure – it was a

[220] Dante Alighieri, *La Vita Nuova*, trans. Barbara Reynolds (London: Penguin, 1969), 47. Plenty of editions of *La Vita Nuova*, in the original Italian and translated into English, are available online and in book format. For a facing Italian/English translation see the *Vita Nuova* at the *Princeton Dante Project* website: http://etcweb.princeton.edu/dante/pdp/vnuova.html.
[221] Ibid., 62.

necessary part of urban life. In this concluding chapter, I will put forward a model of friendship – civil friendship – that pertains to the unique circumstances of medieval Italian cities.[222] It will begin with a discussion of the various networks that were essential to a male citizen's way of life within urban society, then discuss how male friendship – both informal and official – is depicted by three of the period' s most influential thinkers: Brunetto Latini, Dante, and Boccaccio. This chapter – and study of female friendship – will conclude with a preliminary case study of fourteenth–century wills from the Tuscan city of Lucca, which, through the final instructions and bequests of the testators, show that different but comparable friendship patterns existed for women, and so illuminate the ways in which the social functions of female networks informed a woman's civil identity. While women of all classes created wills, civil friendship is a model that largely pertained to city residents with some wealth. While the holy women of the *vitae* were exemplary, as discussed in the previous chapters they and their narratives were intended in part to serve as examples for average women not headed for sanctity, to help them live a pious life within their urban environments. As examples to be followed, they reflected the lived experiences and concerns of urban women. The wills I examine suggest that the functions of friendship evident in the *vitae* did indeed echo real social patterns.

[222] Not to be confused with civic friendship, which was defined by Aristotle as the goodwill between fellow citizens, and suggests an implicitly political bond. In my usage civil refers to persons related or connected through citizenship, or as part of the urban society, but not having anything specifically to do with government or civic duties. Thus throughout this chapter I refer to both civil friendship and civil identity.

Friendship and Social Organization in Urban Life

This dissertation began with an examination of the philosophical and theological underpinnings of medieval friendship theory, which generated models of friendship largely restricted to men. While these sources of friendship theory have been the most thoroughly studied, scholars are increasingly turning their attention to other models of friendship from the medieval period. Such models include, for example, the concept of sworn brotherhood (restricted to men) or friendships between virgins and widows in French Romances, both discussed in Chapter One. The circumstances of late medieval urban Italy suggest a further way of approaching the question of friendship for both men and women – as a constituent element of civil life. Civil society in the Italian cities of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was a web of overlapping allegiances. A male citizen of any given city might have a number of affiliations beyond kinship and citizenship; he was likely a member of an *arte*, belonged to a specific neighborhood or quarter of the city as well as a parish, and perhaps might be associated with a religious confraternity or a political party. Membership in such networks was essential to establishing one's civil identity, and the bonds formed through these communities constituted a model for civil friendship, a concept that became increasingly a topic of interest among Renaissance thinkers, yet had its roots in the early days of the Italian communes.

It was the particular political and economic circumstances, discussed in the Introduction, of many central and northern Italian cities that gave rise to a different concept of friendship within certain urban environments. In many ways, the corporate structure of the *arti* (guilds) resembled that of the *consorterie* or tower societies of the nobility. *Arti*, too, were concerned with protecting their members as well as the economic

interests of their respective trades or professions. As this necessitated a greater degree of civic peace, it was within the interests of the *arti* to actively maintain stability in their cities. *Arti* also acted a source of communal as well as professional support to their members, for example caring for the widows of deceased members, or attending funeral services (something that was required by their oaths). Matriculation into an *arte* also required personal recommendations from a number of members, which assumes that an individual who sought entrance into an *arte* required a pre-existing relationship with a member. Furthermore, members of *arti* often intermarried, further solidifying intra-guild social bonds.[223]

Another form of community within the Italian city was the neighborhood. Like *arti* and *consorterie*, neighborhood associations could be corporate in structure, as many aspects of urban life – from defense to systems of justices – were handled at a micro–local level. The neighborhood networks of Florence have been intensively studied. The city was divided first into quarters (*quartiere)*, and each quarter was further subdivided into *gonfaloni* (subdivision). One cannot overestimate the importance of neighborhoods when considering the civic and social structure of medieval and Renaissance Florence. If a man sought a husband for his daughter or a wife for his son (or himself), or a guardian or godfather for his children, or even a business partner, he would first seek such a person in the *gonfalone*, though if necessary he might turn to the larger *quartiera*.[224] In Florence, the familial makeup of the *gonfalone* mirrored that of the *contado* – the rural area surrounding

[223] Martines, *Power and Imagination: City States in Renaissance Italy*, 77.
[224] Christine Klapisch-Zuber, ""Kin, Friends, and Neighbors": The Urban Territory of a Merchant Family in 1400," in *The Italian Renaissance*, ed. Paula Findlen (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2002).

the city – as the difficulties in securing housing and employment meant that individuals or families migrating from the countryside depended on local connections; often urban neighbors had been country neighbors as well.[225]

But what, one may ask, do neighborhood organizations, *arti*, or extended kinship ties have to do with friendship, either in theory or in practice? Dale Kent, in his lengthy analysis of friendship in the context of Renaissance Florence, describes Florentine society as a "face–to–face" society, where personal relationships were fundamental to social organization and maintained through regular interactions. According to Kent, "[s]ince an individual's security and advancement depended largely upon personal relationships, the streets in which Florentines constantly crossed paths were important sites of making and maintaining friendships."[226] The geography of the city, and even the construction of houses with external benches along the streets, encouraged the meeting of friends, which meant that friendship was on public display, and in turn reinforced the necessity of this bond.[227] Christine Klapisch–Zuber's analysis of the family history kept by a Florentine merchant, Lapo di Giovanni Niccolini de' Sirigatti (1356–1429) is entitled "Kin, Friends and Neighbors," echoing Lapo's own categorization of his personal connections: *parenti, amici,* and *vicini.*[228] For Renaissance moralists Leon Battista Alberti (1404–1472) and Paola da

[225] Or continued to be, as the wealthiest citizens often held property both within the city and in the countryside. Ronald F. E. Weissman, *Ritual Brotherhood in Renaissance Florence* (New York: Academic Press, 1982), 8.
[226] Dale Kent, *Friendship, Love, and Trust in Renaissance Florence* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 90.
[227] Ibid., 96-100.
[228] Klapisch-Zuber, ""Kin, Friends, and Neighbors": The Urban Territory of a Merchant Family in 1400," 97.

Certaldo (ca. 1320~1370), society was divided between friends and strangers.[229] Both practically and intellectually, Italians in the later Middle Ages and Renaissance gave a considerable amount of thought to the meanings and the practice of friendship. Theoretically, it was an integral part of the civil structure, it was a theme that poets and intellectuals embraced, but as a real relationship, it was understood to be tricky and problematic, and certainly unclear in its definition. Yet friendship – as a concept and as a practice – overlapped and intertwined with other forms of social and civil relations, like the *arte* and the neighborhood. It also could cross lines of wealth and status, more formally through patronage, but also through less official forms of contact.

Since these bonds originated in active participation in economic, civic and political life, women would appear to have naturally been excluded. However, Italian women, like their male counter–parts, also circulated within a broad network of family and friends. Establishing and belonging to networks of community and support were a fundamental characteristic of urban and civil life for women, just as for men. They, too, were residents of specific neighborhoods and worshipped in a particular parish. They, too, might be members of confraternities, or even *arti*, either independently or through their husbands. For men, civil friendship was an essential marker of citizenship and essential to establishing one's place in urban society. Likewise, while women were not "citizens" in any legal, this model of friendship nonetheless contributed to the framework of a woman's civil identity; that is, to establishing one's place in the urban community. To be sure, any woman's civil identity was largely derived from that of her father or husband, but the model of civil friendship as it pertained to women also provided varying degrees of

[229] Weissman, *Ritual Brotherhood in Renaissance Florence*, 27.

independence, especially since the feminine version of such relationships was extra–political and economical.[230] While civil friendship is most well articulated in the context of male friendship, it is also a model that can used in reference to women's relationships, making it unique among other medieval models of friendship.

Friendship in the Eyes of Intellectuals and Poets: Latini, Boccaccio, and Dante

Civil friendship for men in the context of urban medieval and Renaissance Italy diverged from the classical models of *amicitia* adopted from Cicero and Aristotle; from the concept of educative love posited in spiritual friendship; and from the chivalric valor that formed the basis of sworn brotherhood. This form of friendship was practical and utilitarian, in spite of the fact that thinkers and poets of the period idealized friendship according to classical models. In his introductory overview of research into the history of friendship, Albrecht Classen argues that particularly in the intellectual world of medieval and Renaissance Italy, friendship was increasingly regarded as "one of the most important social bonds" necessary "to establish stable social communities. . ."[231] In the works of those intellectuals who made their mark at the cusp of the Renaissance – Brunetto Latini, Dante, and Boccaccio – friendship was a prevalent theme, and it would become increasingly theorized over the course of the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries. Through their writings we can see the beginnings of a model of civil friendship, a model that was

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[230] This should not be taken to mean that women did not largely circulate and form friendships within their own social class, nor that their relationships were not constrained at times by the turbulent politics that often rocked Italian cities. Friendships between women might also have proved useful to their husbands' political or economic ambitions, or even their own. On these possible aspects of women's friendships, however, the sources are silent.

[231] Classen, "Friendship - the Quest for a Human Ideal and Value from Antiquity to the Early Modern Time," 57.

idealized (these were poets, after all!) but at the same time reflected the form of friendship that was essential in Italy's cities.

By the fifteenth century – the height of the Renaissance – friendship had become a central and separate theme in Italian literature, but already in late medieval Italy the most prominent writers certainly discussed it, beginning with Brunetto Latini (c. 1240–1294), an Italian scholar, notary, and statesmen.[232] Latini discussed friendship in *Li Livres dou Tresor (The Book of the Treasure)*, composed in French prose during a period of exile in France. This encyclopedic work proved to be very popular; there are 73 extant manuscripts in French, and numerous translations into other vernacular languages including Italian.[233] Albrecht Classen has described Latini's work as the moment of the "triumph of friendship" in the Middle Ages.[234] When one reads the actual text, this characterization feels at first like something of an exaggeration. *Li Livres dou Tresor* is a compendium of classical and early Christian writings. Book II, "Instruction of Vices and Virtues," is based largely on Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*, that most influential text when it came to friendship theory in the Middle Ages (not to mention the present day), and it is within this Book that we find Latini's discussions of friendship.

While the *Nichomachean Ethics* formed the basis of these discussions of friendship, Latini took Aristotle's concept of *amicitia* and translated it to fit his own worldview and

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[232] Latini was also a teacher to Dante; in *Inferno* the character Dante encountered Latini in Canto 15, in the seventh circle among the sodomites. Despite placing Latini in Hell, Dante's portrayal of his former tutor was positive and sympathetic. And in the Seventh Circle, Latini was surrounded by many clerks and scholars.
[233] Brunetto Latini, *The Book of the Treasure (Li Livres Dou Tresor)*, trans. Paul Barrette and Spurgeon Baldwin (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993).
[234] Classen, "Friendship - the Quest for a Human Ideal and Value from Antiquity to the Early Modern Time," 58.

circumstances (remember he was writing this as an exile from his beloved city of Florence). Latini also referenced the biblical Salomon, Cicero, Seneca, and such early Church Fathers as Ambrose and Jerome in his discussions of friendship. After identifying friendship as a virtue of God and of man, following Aristotle, Latini defined the three types of friendship "recognized by the things loved", that is good, profit, and pleasure.[235] These latter two things, of course, are not the basis of perfect or true friendship, since once profit has been obtained or pleasure has run its course, there is nothing to hold these friendships together. Furthermore, also in agreement with Aristotle, while bad men, or one bad and one good man, can enter into a friendship driven by either profit or pleasure, perfect friendship – based on the mutual love of virtue and goodness in the other – can only be attained by good men.

All this followed Aristotle quite closely, although Latini framed friendship as virtue recognized and granted by God, who played no part in Aristotle's thinking. But Latini also emphasized the importance of friendship within communal life, and saw physical proximity as necessary for the building and maintenance of friendship. So, for example, he describes friendship "as praiseworthy adornment among those who live together and who frequent one another, and it is a very beautiful life within which they live in peace and relaxation." Friendship, however, can grow cool if there is a long separation, such as when one partner

[235] Latini, *The Book of the Treasure (Li Livres Dou Tresor)*, 177-78. Latini's discussion of Aristotlean *amicitia* is contained in Chapters 43 and 44 of Book II, which can be found on pages 177–183 of this translation. An online edition in the original French can be found at "Li Livres Dou Tresor: Deuxiem Livre," http://www.florin.ms/tresor2.html.

goes on pilgrimage.[236] Cities bring together many people, both good and bad, and in such circumstances friendships are more easily formed:

> When people live together in good and in evil and in commerce and in dealing with one another, these things customarily are the beginnings of friendship, and the amount of these things determines the amount of their friendship. What friends have should be held in common by them because friendship is like community, and each community desires things appropriate to it in concupiscence and victory and wisdom . . . It is for this reason that the solemnities of Easter and the offerings of sacrifices and the assemblies in the cities were instituted, so that companionship and love might arise between the people and their neighbors, and honor be accorded to God.[237]

A political exile who had witnessed his own city torn apart by factionalism, Latini presented a view of friendship as an imperative for the peace of the commune, and something that should be actively fostered through public life. Later on in the text, he linked friendship with the city even more directly. This second discussion of friendship occurs in chapters 102 through 106, but the preceding chapter is on charity. This was a specifically medieval Christian notion of charity or *caritas*: "to love God, and your neighbor as much as yourself." Latini proceeded to list eight "reasons" or circumstances that ought to encourage *caritas* among Christians. The seventh of these – "the profit which comes out of love and companionship" – was linked by Latini directly to communal stability. In reference to Solomon, he stated "it is better to be two together than one alone, for the brother who is helped by his brother is like a strong city;' and from Cicero, "those who forego the friendship of men forego the good counsel of the world; because human things

[236] We might also speculate that Latini was thinking of his own long absence and separation from his city of Florence, and his own friendships that were now endangered.
[237] Latini, *The Book of the Treasure (Li Livres Dou Tresor)*, 179-80.

are fragile and destructible, we must always acquire friends who love us and are loved by us." Thus, Latini presented friendship as an aspect or form of Christian *caritas*, the absence of which can lead to communal instability, if not all–out war, for the eighth reason to encourage *caritas* that he gives is "the very cruel damage which proceeds from war and from hatred of one's neighbor."[238]

Friendship, according to Latini, does not just happen: rather it requires hard work to be established and maintained, and he proceeds to list a number of dos and don'ts and to offer a more detailed examination of the types of friendship that he had identified in his earlier discussion of Aristotelian friendship. While *caritas* is a virtue that all men should display towards each other, and while friendship, as suggested above, could be thought of as a form or perhaps model for Christian *caritas*, not all men – not even all good men – can or need to be friends. Friendship is a specific form of *caritas*, but these are not interchangeable concepts. Thus, *caritas* would demand men of higher status to love those of lower status, but Latini acknowledges that men of different means might have trouble attaining true or perfect friendship (those lesser forms, friendships based on pleasure and profit, are more easily entered into by men of different statuses):

> The fifth requirement is the community of things; for this reason, the philosopher [Aristotle] said when he heard of two men who were friends: why is this one poor and the other one is rich? Nevertheless, Cicero says: give according to your ability, not everything, but as much as it takes to sustain your friend; but it is an ugly thing, so says Cicero, to keep track of favors one does for the other . . . The sixth requirement is to maintain equality, for friendship does not admit any inequality.

[238] Ibid., 252.

> Cicero says: a very great thing it is in friendship when the noble person makes himself equal to the less noble one.[239]

Kent argues that the essence of Renaissance friendship "whether it entailed profit or not, was the obligation to assist one's friends"[240] and, in her analysis of Lapo's family journal, Klapisch-Zuber notes that relationships were evaluated in terms of social utility.[241] When such relationships existed between men of different rank or wealth, friendship looked very much like patronage. In the context of Genoa, where the magnate families incorporated minor nobles and wealthy bourgeoisie into their kinship group, these sorts of networks also were based on elements common among patronage and friendship between men of different ranks.[242] While that sense of equality in all things among friends was standard in philosophical constructions of the relationship, what we can perceive in discussions and practices of friendship among the urban elite (both noble and bourgeois) of late medieval and Renaissance Italy is that both notions of Christian *caritas* and the social structure of the Italian city complicated this particular requirement at a practical level. Yet that formal concept of friendship rooted in classical philosophy continued to inform the meaning of friendship.[243]

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[239] Ibid., 254.
[240] Kent, *Friendship, Love, and Trust in Renaissance Florence*, 32.
[241] Klapisch-Zuber, ""Kin, Friends, and Neighbors": The Urban Territory of a Merchant Family in 1400," 97.
[242] Late medieval and Renaissance Genoa more closely resembled Venice, where the magnate families retained control of the government. For a discussion of friendship and patronage networks in Genoa see: Diane Owen Hughes, "Kinsmen and Neighbors in Medieval Genoa," in *The Medieval City*, ed. Harry A. Miskimin, David Herlihy, and A. L. Udovitch (New Haven Yale University Press, 1977).
[243] One can assume that personal relationships of a more casual sort existed alongside formal forms of friendship that simply do not make it into the written record.

Both Dante and Boccaccio also discuss friendship in their works. This chapter began with a scene from Dante's *La Vita Nuova* that describes his beloved Beatrice as surrounded by what seems like an impenetrable circle of female companions. Dante, also makes mention of his own circle of friends throughout the text. These are often passing references. For example, in Chapter IV Dante writes how his friends (*amici*) were anxious about his health because he appeared so debilitated and frail–looking on account of his preoccupation with Beatrice. In the marriage scene (Chapter XIV) described above, it is Dante's friend who has dragged him to the wedding: his friend hopes that he will be pleased and amused at the chance to serve many beautiful young ladies, but since Beatrice is there, it only leads to despair – and fainting – for our poor lover. This was, of course, not the intention of the unnamed friend:

> . . .it happened that this most gracious person [Beatrice] was present where many women were gathered together. I too was taken there by a friend who thought it would give me great pleasure to be present where so many beautiful women were to be seen. Hardly knowing where I was being taken, and trusting the person who in fact had brought his friend almost to the verge of death, I said: "Why have we come to visit these ladies?"[244]

Many of Dante's references to his friends were in passing, as in the above quote, but Dante also discussed more intimate friendships. Often Dante sent his sonnets to these friends either for their enjoyment or for their analysis, and at times he himself receives sonnets from them. In Chapter III, Dante describes composing a sonnet that was actually a request "[t]o every captive soul and gentle heart" to interpret a vision he has had. He widely circulated this sonnet, and received many replies to this request, including individuals with

[244] Alighieri, *La Vita Nuova*, 47.

whom he was not acquainted. One in particular stood out; its sender, "was someone who I [now] call my closest friend." This individual did not just reply with an interpretation, but wrote for Dante a sonnet in return. While Dante and the sender did not know each other before Dante received his sonnet, "Our friendship dated from the time he learned that it was I who had sent him the sonnet."[245]

Dante's second best friend was, incidentally, Beatrice's brother, described by Dante as "someone who in the hierarchy of friendship stands immediately after the first."[246] He asked Dante to compose a poem for him about a lady who has died: "After speaking to me a little while he asked me to compose something for a lady who had died, disguising his worlds so that it seemed as if he were talking of someone else who was also dead. Realizing be was speaking of our blessed departed one [Beatrice], I said I would do as he requested."[247] Since Dante decides to write a poem in which "I would give some expression to my grief" it takes him a couple of tries to get the tone correct. But this little exchange, between Dante and a man whom he claims is his second–best friend, is quite mysterious. Dante, as we know from the text, keeps the object of his love a secret, but why does his second–best friend – who is Beatrice's own brother – not reveal the true person in whose memory he wants the poem composed? There could not be any shame in mourning one's own sister. The implication is that he has caught on to Dante's feeling, and is therefore using this ploy to try to give his friend an outlet for his grief while saving his friend any discomfort or embarrassment. Once again, Dante is less detailed than we would like. But

[245]Ibid., 32-33.. Alas, Dante only provides the reader with the first line of his friend's sonnet.
[246] Ibid., 85. Dante's "first," or best, friend, was fellow poet Guido Cavalcanti (d. 1300), to whom *La Vita Nuova* was dedicated.
[247] Ibid., 85.

while Dante is not particularly specific about the nature of his various friendships, he does present a picture of medieval Florentine society in which young men and women circulated in gendered networks of friends.

Friendship is a theme in a few of the tales included in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, as well as in the frame story itself. Three stories in particular discuss friendship. Two of these stories are told on the first day, and in both the friendship described crossed religious lines: in the first (I.2) the friendship described is that between a Christian and a Jew, and in the second (I.3) between a Jew and a Muslim (and not any Muslim, but the famed Saladin himself). The second story of the first day is about a Christian Parisian merchant who has as his closest friend a fellow merchant, Abraham, who is Jewish. Not only do they share their profession, but also both are described as rich as well as "honest and upright." Indeed, they are quite equal, except that Abraham is Jewish while Gianotto is Christian. Because of their close friendship, and Gianotto's great respect for the character of his dear friend, he finds himself greatly troubled that Abraham is of a faith that will land him in a state of perdition, and pleads for him to convert. Abraham decides that he will travel to Rome to observe the papal court, and if he likes what he finds he will convert. Poor Gianotto tries to talk him out of his plan, knowing that if Abraham sees what actually goes on at the papal court, there is no way he would view Christianity as the superior religion. Abraham does visit Rome and as predicted is appalled by the behavior of the Roman curia, but much to Gianotto's delight chooses to convert anyway, with the following logic:

> The way it looks to me, Your Shepherd, and all the others, too, are only interested in reducing the Christian religion to nothing and use all their wits and all their skill to drive it from the world, just when they should be serving as its foundation and support. Still, since I see that what they are trying to do hasn't happened, and the

> fact is that your religion is constantly growing and becoming more resplendent and illustrious, I think I am right to conclude that the Holy Spirit must indeed be its foundation and support, for it is truer and holier than any other.[248]

Abraham converts, and his good friend Gianotto acts as his godfather, a role that within Italian cities was often an honor that was reserved for friends, or was used to establish a bond of friendship. With Abraham's conversion to the Christian faith, Gianotto and Abraham (or Giovanni as he would from that point be known) come to perfectly realize true and perfect friendship as imagined by Aristotle: equal in all things and drawn to each other through a love of the other's goodness. Boccaccio does not make this connection explicitly in the text, but the equality of the friends is emphasized throughout the story, indicating that this aspect of Aristotle's theory was an accepted element of friendship.

The next story also involves a friendship. The teller, Filomena, segues into her story by commenting: "Since we have already spoken quite well about God and the truth of our faith, no one should object if at this point we descend to worldly events and the deeds of men."[249] One could make a similar comparison regarding the friendships portrayed in each story – the perfect friendship portrayed in the story of Gianotto and Abraham and a much more worldly, strategic, and practical friendship that is portrayed in Filomena's story. Filomena's story is about Melchisedech, a Jewish moneylender from Alexandria, who is sent for by Saladin. Saladin is short on funds, and hopes to get some money from Melchisedech, but as the moneylender "was so miserly he would never do so of his own free will" and

[248] Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, trans. Wayne A. Rebhor (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2013), 41-42.
[249] Ibid., 43.

Saladin does not wish to use force, the Sultan instead turns towards trickery.[250] His plan is to ask Melchisedech about which of the three religions – Judaism, Christianity, or Islam – is the most true, in hopes of forcing Melchisedech to say something against Islam, and so be forced to appease Saladin's wrath by lending the requested money. But Melchisedech catches on, and tells a tale that gets him out of answering the question directly. Saladin is impressed with Melchisedech's cunning, and ends up asking for the loan outright, which he is granted. Both men found the other's wisdom and cunning appealing, and this resulted in a kind of friendship between the two men: "Saladin bestowed the most lavish gifts on Melchisedech, becoming his lifelong friend, and kept him at his side in a lofty position of honor."[251] While these two characters were of different religions, and status, they find in each other a commonality that leads to friendship.

The last tale from the *Decameron* to be discussed takes on the theme of friendship much more directly. It deconstructs the ideal of perfect friendship by introducing a practical (or at least practical in the context of imaginative fiction!) problem into a particular relationship. This story (X.8) is much longer and significantly more complex than the earlier two stories. The teller is Filomena, who also recounted the story of Melchisedech and Saladin, and she introduces her tale as "a story about two citizens, who were friends, and about the laudable magnanimity they displayed towards one another."[252] This tale is about two young men who are the best of friends. When one of the friends,

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[250] This tale is rather confusing, since Melchisedech was a moneylender, why would he not want to lend money? As there is no indication that Saladin was looking for a handout, rather than a loan, it seems that while Melchisedech available the large sums of money that Saladin was required, Saladin assumed that the moneylender would be reluctant to part with that much money.
[251] Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, 45.
[252] Ibid., 801.

Gisippus, asks the other, Titus, to accompany him to meet the woman Gisippus' family has arranged for him to marry, Titus falls in love with her. When Titus becomes severely ill from lovesickness, and eventually admits to Gisippus that he is in love with his fiancée, Gisippus offers to let Titus marry the young woman in his stead. When the time comes for the couple to consummate their marriage, it is Titus whom comes to Sophronia, who thanks to the cover of darkness does not realize she has been tricked, until the men are forced to reveal the deception. Many years later, after Titus and Sophronia (still married) have moved to a different city and fallen out of touch with Gisippus, the two men are thrown together once again when Gisippus, having lost his wealth and status, is accused of a crime he did not commit, but for which he is willing to take the blame on account of his great despair. Remembering the favor that his friend did for him so long ago, Titus claims that he is actually guilty. Eventually the true guilty party comes forward, and Gisippus and Titus resume their friendship and everyone, presumably, lives happily ever after.[253] This tale is very explicitly about friendship, as the teller Filomena makes clear throughout. When Titus first admits to Gisippus his love for Sophronia, Gissipus is angry only at the fact that his friend has kept his feelings a secret and so responds:

> "Titus," he said, "if you were not in need of comfort the way you are, I would take you to task for having violated our friendship by keeping the terrible burden of this passion of your hidden from me for so long. Although such feelings may have seemed improper to you, they should not be concealed from a friend, anymore than proper ones should be, for just as a true friend delights in sharing honorable things with his friend, so he will do everything in his power to remove that which is

[253] This brief summary of the tale is already convoluted, but an 1886 English language translation by John Payne is available online thanks to Project Gutenberg, for those readers wishing to find out the details of the Titus' and Gisippus' plot. The URL is http://www.gutenberg.org/files/23700/23700–h/23700–h.htm

dishonorable from his friend's heart."[254]

In this case that dishonorable thing is the coveting of his best friend's fiancée, and in order for Gisippus to remedy this situation – to "remove what is dishonorable," the coveting of his best friend's fiancée – he must offer poor Sophronia, who is not even asked her thoughts on the matter, up to Titus. The two friends are not quite sharing all things in common, however, since only Titus is officially married to Sophronia, and only he gets consummate the marriage. When both Gisippus' and Sophronia's families eventually find out about the ploy, Titus defends his friend's action by presenting as his first argument that Gisippus ought to "deserve the highest praise" rather than their scorn "because he has done what a friend should do . . ."[255] Filomena concludes her tale about Titus and Gisippus with a lengthy discourse on the merits of friendship, in which she asserts that friendship is a more sacred and more powerful bond than blood or kinship:

> Let men therefore go on wishing for throngs of kinsmen, hordes of brothers, and swarms of children, and let them use their wealth to increase the number of their servants. But what they continue to ignore is that every single one of these people, no matter who he may be, is more worried about the least little danger to himself than concerned to ward off the great perils faced by his father, his brother, or his master, whereas what we see happening between friends is precisely the opposite.[256]

[254] Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, 805.
[255] Ibid., 811. Titus' further arguments are that once Sophronia had been given to Gisippus, he was free to pass her on, and that Sophronia's family should actually rejoice since he (Titus) is of higher status than Gisippus!
[256] Ibid., 819.

When it came to determining which bond was superior – the bond of friendship or the bond of kinship – people in the Middle Ages and Renaissance were ambivalent. Certainly Filomena's depiction of friendship places that relationship above all things, and in *La Vita Nuova* one gets a sense that Dante circulated mostly among those he identified as friends, rather than among family. Yet the strongest ties of friendship are described in familial terms, so that Titus and Gisippus are described as having "a feeling of brotherliness and friendship so powerful that it lasted until their dying day."[257] Indeed when Gisippus' father dies, it is difficult for friends and family to know which one needs more comfort, both Gisippus and Titus were so upset! The concept of sworn brotherhood as a way to make formal a strong bond of friendship also suggests some overlap between these concepts.[258] Of course, brotherhood was also used in the context of monasticism as well as the lay confraternities that were so popular in medieval Italian cities.

This literary interest in friendship and the value placed on friendship above blood and kin relations were not reflected in the records of day–to–day life. Thus we can return to the family history recorded by Lapo, discussed previously in this chapter. In Klapisch–Zuber's analysis of the text, she notes that of the individuals identified in his text, Lapo named around 40 blood relatives and 50 extended kin, but, only a "handful" as identified friends.[259] These identified friends were privileged neighbors and close business associates; thus one such friend of Lapo's is a notary who worked with him on a number of

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[257] Ibid., 802. In the original Italian, the phrase used is "*una fratallenza e una amicizia*." The online edition of the Italian text of the *Decameron* can be found at *Decameron Web*, a project of the The Italian Studies Department at Brown University. URL: http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian_Studies/dweb/texts/DecIndex.php?lang=it.
[258] Sworn brotherhood is discussed in Chapter One.
[259] Klapisch-Zuber, ""Kin, Friends, and Neighbors": The Urban Territory of a Merchant Family in 1400," 117. In this case, it is essential to note that reciprocity was understood.

business affairs, as well as more delicate personal affairs. Lapo expresses his own desire to render service to the notary and his family, illustrating a common element of urban Italian friendships: the exchange of "free" favors.[260] While the idea of friendship as expressed by Lapo is one of utility, friends differed from other types of associates and acquaintances in how that sense of obligation was understood: friends did favors for friends because of the bond of friendship, rather than a sense of contractual obligation and fair exchange, which once completed, would terminate the relationship. Furthermore, in the concept of friendship found in the writings of Lapo, there was a certain ease within the relationship that was not there either in blood or kinship ties:

> While blood relatives customarily ate together under the same roof, and made this sharing into a right, and while affinally related families participated in the ritual of feasting that sanctioned events important to their lineages, neighbors were invited to drop in for a glass of cool wine on a hot day or to stop for a snack outside the doorstep in simple gatherings that sealed neighborhood good feeling[261].

There are two things to note in the above description of friends by Klapisch–Zuber which are reflected in other historical analyses of friendship during this period: first, that connection via urban geography – friends tended to be one's neighbors, reinforcing the importance of neighborhood and the micro–local – and second, that reference to friends meeting for a snack on doorsteps, recalling the purpose of the architectural design of urban

[260] Ibid., 119. "Free" in so far as there was no specific *quid pro quo*, but there was an assumption that both parties in the relationship would provide and receive favors equally.
[261] Ibid., 120.

housing noted by Kent, with the external benches that provided a place of meeting for friends and neighbors.[262]

Yet in Lapo's family history, relationships described as friendship are less numerous, and so appear less important, than those of blood or kinship. Thus while Latini acknowledged the importance of friendship on the stability of urban community, and poets like Boccaccio wrote of the superiority of friendship, there existed in society an ambivalent assessment: on the one hand, literary discourse elevated friendship, but on the other, when it came to day–to–day practices, friendship was thought of largely in terms of utility.

Tracing Women's Networks: A Case Study of Lucchese Wills

Of course when writers like Latini were thinking about friendship, they were assuming a relationship among men. If we look to the example that began this chapter, of Dante's Beatrice in the company of her friends, we see well–to–do women socializing with each other, but we are as distanced from the details of these relationships as was Dante himself. Records of women's experiences are slim. The *vitae* provide quite a revealing picture of the civil life of women, and it is clear that friendship among women was an integral part of that civil life, but in order to more fully understand the meaning and practice of civil friendship among women, it is necessary to examine other sources as well.

[262] While these benches built into the outward facing walls of residences appear to have been a common feature, in the context of the most wealthy and powerful urban families – the Medici for instance – the benches also provided a place for those visiting the powerful family heads to wait for an audience, some of whom would have been identified as *amici*. See Kent, *Friendship, Love, and Trust in Renaissance Florence*, 100. Further, that such benches were along the street, they made public whom was visiting to passers-by. Friendship, in this context, was a made a public relationship.

To end this study of female friendship, I would like to suggest one possible approach to further understanding the role of personal relationships as an essential aspect within the lives of urban Italian women, and particularly women who were not on the path to sanctity. The average woman – and indeed medieval man – left little evidence of her or his existence from which historians might glean information about their day–to–day experiences. However, many women did leave at least one source indicative of their feelings and values: their final wills and testaments. Wills from Italian cities are a rich and varied source because leaving a will was a relatively common activity, practiced by many people, from the very rich to those of small means.[263] Furthermore in many Italian city–states Roman law was practiced, which recognized that women had the right to hold, control and dispose of property regardless of marital status. Thus testamentary evidence can potentially include wills from women of varying marital statuses and economic backgrounds. The *Archivio di Stato* of the city of Lucca has in its collection a series of notarial registers dedicated to wills. Here I will consider the contents of three of those registers, which include 84 wills composed by female testators.[264] These wills span the

[263] Some recent studies of women's legal status in Italy include: Shona Kelly Wray, "Women, Testaments, and Notarial Culture in Bologna's Contado" and Elena Brizio, "In the Shadow of the Campo: Sienese Women and their Families (c. 1400–1600) in *Across the Religious Divide: Women, Property, and Law in the Wider Mediterranean (ca. 1300–1700)*, ed. Jutta Gisela Sperling and Shona Kelly Wray (New York: Routledge, 2009), and Janie Smith, "Women as Legal Agents in Late Medieval Genoa," in *Writing Medieval Women's Lives*, ed. Charlotte Newman Goldy and Amy Livingstone (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

[264] Lucca was the small but relatively wealthy capital city of the Republic of Lucca. Its history followed the general trajectory described in the Introduction: in 1160 Lucca declared itself a commune and during the twelfth century set about conquering the surrounding countryside (the *contado*). The Republic of Lucca remained mostly independent until it was conquered by Napoleon in 1805. In the early fourteenth century, Lucca was a rival of Florence, and defeated the Florentines on the battlefield in 1325, but from 1342-1368 Lucca was under the occupation of Pisa. For a recent, general history of

years 1340 to 1376, and are contained in registers from two separate notaries. The majority of women's wills contained in these registers are those of widows, but there are also a number of wills belonging to married women, and even a scattering of seemingly single women's testaments. They vary in length from a single page to upwards of ten.[265]

Wills can be a promising yet maddening source for the historian seeking out the lived experience of women in the medieval period. Promising because many women of various levels in society wrote wills: maddening because, by their very nature, wills are formulaic and impersonal documents, yet are almost always the only source for the individual testator, particularly in the case of women. Wills were public documents: they were prepared by notaries and legally required the presence of witnesses and a member of the clergy. Usually creating the will during significant illness or feebleness, the testator would likely have been surrounded by family and close friends. Despite the formulaic nature of medieval testaments, these documents can be read and interpreted as public statements of a woman's identity, not simply at the time of their composition but also posthumously, although the audience for this identity might be quite limited. Through her will, a woman could show which religious institutions she was tied to or supported;

Lucca in the medieval and Renaissance periods see: M. E. Bratchel, *Medieval Lucca: And the Revolution of the Renaissance State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[265] The wills are contained in the first three volumes of the following collection: *Testamenti*. Lucca. Archivio di Stato di Lucca. Lucca and this selection of wills were selected for a variety of reasons: Lucca is as representative a city of central and northern Italy as a medieval Italian city can be. Increasingly, its political and economic history has become of interest to scholars of medieval and Renaissance Italy, but its social history less so, although its archives – while limited – are accessible. The history of the region has been dominated by Florence, but historians are working to branch out, as is indicated in this essay collection: Thomas W. Blomquist and Maureen F. Mazzaoui, eds., *The "Other Tuscany": Essays in the History of Lucca, Pisa, and Siena During the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Centuries* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1994).

through personal bequests, she could indicate those family members or acquaintances closest to her; and through charitable bequests she made known the issues important to her. Read in this way, wills become a lens through which to view an individual woman in relation to her social network, which, while dominated by religious institutions and familial concerns, also might have included close friends. Of course, an individual will provides a very limited picture of what one can imagine was a very full life. However, when a number of wills from the same place and period are studied collectively, we can uncover the parameters through which women sought to define themselves as members of their broader community.[266]

The wills within the Lucchese archives all follow a general pattern: the testator made provisions for burial, left specific bequests to institutions and individuals, named her heirs, and charged her executors with their duties. The witnesses present at the will–making were also identified. The vast majority of bequests were made to religious institutions: churches, convents, and monasteries. Bequests made to such institutions appear most often in the form of cash rather than goods. Less common was for women in Lucca to leave funds for hospitals, although all wills included charitable bequests to the "poor and indigent." Bequests made to individuals were also primarily in the form of money, and it appears that most recipients were family members: sons and daughters to

[266] Many historians, especially social historians, have turned to the contents of wills as sources for the daily lives and relationships of women. Often wills are examined as a collection, through which one can research general patterns of a social group. See, for example: Joel Rosenthal, "Fifteenth–Century Widows and Widowhood: Bereavement, Reintegration, and Life Choices" in *Wife and Widow in Medieval England* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993). For examples of studies using individual wills see: Janet L. Nelson, "The wary widow" in *Property and Power in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) and Heidi Vierow, "The Will of Raimonda: Testament of a Woman in the Twelfth Century." *Manuscripta* 36 (1992).

be sure, but also extended family such as siblings, and, more commonly, nieces and nephews. But sometimes women made bequests to non–family members, too. Generally, the longer the will, the more likely that it would include bequests made to individuals as well as religious institutions, while shorter wills might not contain any individual bequests.

The most common strategy of Lucchese women was to arrange for numerous small bequests to a variety of religious institutions, and, when resources allowed, to family members, and sometimes friends. Even the shortest of wills would often list three or four churches, all of which were likely within the city of Lucca. If you have had the pleasure of visiting Lucca, you will know that it is quite a small place. One can walk the diameter – the old part of the city is round – in about 20 minutes, even less when there are no tourists. Yet the wealthiest of testators had no problems identifying dozens of churches, chapels, convents and monasteries to which to leave their money.[267] Angela, wife of Thomas (who was still living at the time this will was composed), wished to be buried at the church of St John. She also made a monetary bequest to this church. She also made bequests to the churches of St. Gregory, St. Julia, and St. Jacob, where she specifically left a bequest to the works and buildings (*opere et fabrice*), not just for her own soul, but also the souls of her parents and her benefactors.[268]

Considering that most bequests stipulated a monetary sum and relatively general instructions, on those rare occasions when a specific item is left to an individual or specific instructions are given, one might speculate that there was some significance to the item in

[267] Tourist guides often refer to Lucca as the city of 100 churches.
[268] Angela uxor. Testamenti di Federico Scortica – Scortica II. Volume II. Lucca. Testamenti. Archivio de Stato di Lucca. 149v–150.

question, or the relationship with the individual. Angela's bequest to St. Jacob's is one example of a more specific bequest, in terms of what the funds were intended for and the inclusion of her parents and benefactors in the request for prayers.[269] The will of one widow, named of Telda, contains a number of interesting bequests. Telda's will is a little different from most of the other wills in this collection, as her will contains only a few bequests to religious institutions, but those are in gold coins. Her will, while only one and a half pages in length, also contains a number of bequests to individuals. Based on her will, Telda had three surviving siblings – a brother and two sisters – a number of nieces, and also two daughters of her own. She left money to her brother Bartholomew, and to the daughters of her sister Clare. Another of Telda's sisters – Nella – also had two daughters. To one of these, Telda left money, but to the other she left a silver–colored decanter. One wonders, was there something special about the relationship between aunt and niece, or perhaps did the niece covet, for some reason, this particular decanter?[270]

After specific bequests, the remainder of the woman's estate was left to her heirs. In the case of married women, the heir was inevitably their husband, while children were most often the heirs of widows. Thus the widow Telda, for example, whose will I described above, named as her heirs her two unmarried daughters. Angela left her estate to her husband Thomas; they appear to have been childless. However, the will of one woman by the name of Margareta is something of a mystery. Margareta was identified as a wife rather than a widow, but her heir is her mother. Margareta's will is quite short, with only nine bequests. Margareta requested to be buried in the church at the monastery of Saint

[269] Further to this mystery, who were these unnamed benefactors?
[270] Telda relicta. Testamenti Di Bartolomeo Buonmesi, 1340–1376 – Buonmens I. Volume I. Lucca. Testamenti. Archivio di Stato di Lucca. 29v–30.

Augustine in Lucca. She left money for masses to be said for her soul, as well as money to four other Lucchese churches, a small number in comparison to most other testators' wills. She also stipulated that a son from her first marriage have what he was legally entitled to, although the will does not give any details. But what of her current husband, who normally would have been named as her heir? Had he abandoned her? Gone missing? Furthermore, since her mother was alive, it would appear that Margareta was relatively young at the time that this will was composed, even though she was onto her second marriage. All this suggests quite a sad back–story for poor Margareta.[271]

Legally, a woman could appoint female executors for her will, which can offer further evidence for female relationships. In addition, while legal witnesses had to be male, notaries did list who was present at the will–making, giving us further indications of the people to whom women felt close. Thus the widow Telda named as her executors her two sisters. Those who were present as she created her will, likely while on her sick–bed as was common practice, were an Augustinian friar, her brother, and one of her sisters. Those present when poor Margareta wrote her will, were two maternal uncles who were her executors, as well as her mother. At the bedside of Ghita, wife of Manfred, was a woman Morina, whose relationship to the testator is unknown, but who does not appear to have been a relative, as familial relationships are usually specified. We can tell that both Ghita

[271] Margareta uxor. 'Testamenti Di Bartolomeo Buonmesi, 1340 - 1376 - Buonmens I'. Lucca. Testamenti. Archivio di Stato di Lucca. 25v–26.

and Morina were of the same social status, identified as *domina*. We can speculate, then, that Morina, who was clearly not a family member, was most likely a friend.[272]

The unanswerable questions raised by wills, such as the whereabouts of poor Margareta's husband or the nature of the friendship between Ghita and Morina, illustrate the dilemmas encountered by all historians who use testamentary evidence in their research: these are but small snapshots of much fuller lives, lives which contained multiple and complex relationships. Thus considered by themselves, wills like these are quite limited, yet within the wills we are able to catch glimpses of female fellowship beyond family members, in those bequests to women who appear not to be related to the testator. We can also find evidence in the wills of relationships between a woman and a female relative that might indicate a particular bond: relatives can also be friends, too. It should be noted that thus far I have not come across bequests to men who were not blood relations of the testator. The presence of un–related women at the sick–bed of the testator, while the will was being composed, such as we see in the case of Ghita, provide further evidence of women's networks. Unrelated women, as beneficiaries or as companions at the testator's bedside, are not an uncommon feature within the wills in general. The presence of female friends in these particular sources tells us more than that women had emotional connections to other women, because wills were so constrained by custom and legal formulae. The inclusion of female friends in wills, as beneficiaries or as witnesses, reinforces the depiction of friendship found in the *vitae*, suggesting that a woman's friendships were an important aspect of her identity, not just to the woman herself. This

[272] Ghita uxor. 'Testamenti Di Bartolomeo Buonmesi, 1340 - 1376 - Buonmens I'. Lucca. Testamenti. Archivio di Stato di Lucca. 21v–23.

public statement of such friendships contoured how she was recognized and remembered by her immediate community.

Evidence in the wills also supports the notion that networks of women had a traditional, recognized function in civil society of fourteenth–century Lucca. One of the most intriguing bits of evidence I came across within this collection were bequests providing money to a specific woman, who was in turn responsible for distributing it to the poor. Most of the wills include this sort of bequest, and no other instructions are provided, suggesting that this was a common practice within Lucchese society. In those wills in which the testator meticulously denoted who was a familial relation, the woman requested to act as her posthumous charitable representative is not identified as a relative, indicating that this might have been a responsibility bestowed based on criteria other than kinship. Thus Ghitta, who named a number of unrelated females in her will, provides funds to a Domina B_____ for the "*pauperi et egni"* (the poor and indigent). This same Domina B____ also received a bequest of her own.[273] Of course, within the context of a will, leaving alms for the very poor is not uncommon, but that the responsibility for distributing charity is not simply left to the executor or to a religious institution suggests that in death, the women of Lucca were continuing a practice of coming together to care for the poor. Did these testators want to ensure that a specific charitable project was continued, perhaps? Were these bequests a token of shared interest while the testator lived? Certainly in the Middle Ages, lay charitable initiative was the norm, especially within urban environments, but these bequests suggest that providing charity was a recognized role of female fellowship.

[273] Ghita uxor. 'Testamenti Di Bartolomeo Buonmesi, 1340 - 1376 - Buonmens I'. Lucca. Testamenti. Archivio di Stato di Lucca. 21v–23.

In a few wills, the testator also arranged for multiple contributions to charity. The unusual will of Telda included such a bequest, whereby money was provided to a woman by the name of Melline to distribute to paupers and the indigent. But Telda also left instructions to her executors to provide for the poor.[274] One of the lengthiest wills in the collection is that of the widow Guillimina. While length cannot automatically be equated with wealth, Guillimina certainly appears to have had plenty of resources to spread around. Her will contains the traditional instruction that money be given to a specific woman – in this case a fellow widow, Domina Bona – to give to the poor, but Guillimina also provided funds for her granddaughter to give to the poor and indigent.[275] Thus our female testators sometimes made multiple provisions for the poor, but almost all testators included a bequest of charitable funds to be distributed by a designated female, unrelated by blood or marriage. This act of providing funds for another woman to give to the poor, presumably on behalf of the testator after her death, recalls the various examples of women coming together for the sake of charity for the poor or in aid of others that are found within the *vitae*. Umiliana de' Cerchi and her sister–in–law Ravenna worked together to provide bread to the poor of Florence. The companions Marinaria and Raneria together supported the desperate Margaret of Cortona. And Clara Gambacorta was one of a group of women who came together to help out a friend care for her very sick husband. In the context of the *vitae* these pictures of charitable activity – be it to poor strangers or close friends – provided examples of how a pious laywomen ought to behave. These common

[274] Telda relicta. Testamenti Di Bartolomeo Buonmesi, 1340–1376 – Buonmens I. Volume I. Lucca. Testamenti. Archivio di Stato di Lucca. 29v–30.
[275] Guillimina relicta. Testamenti Di Bartolomeo Buonmesi, 1340–1376 – Buonmens I. Volume I. Lucca. Testamenti. Archivio di Stato di Lucca. 3–6. The same language was used for both sets of instructions: *pauperi et egni.*

testamentary instructions for money to provide for the poor seem to be an extension of this activity, but in the context of wills such acts can also considered as public statements of identity, and specifically her civil identity. Certain charitable acts as well as the testator's naming of her representative were ways in which a woman might situate herself within the her city. While civil friendships among men may have been more formal and more clearly defined within the rhetoric of city life, testamentary evidence of Lucca, when considered alongside representations of female fellowship and pious activity in the *vitae*, suggest that among women – at least in Lucca – civil friendship was as important and as essential for individual women, and like their male counterparts, helped to establish their civil identity.

Conclusion

Examining the forms and functions of friendship provides to historians another lens through which to view and interpret the structures of past societies. In regard to women's history, this task becomes more challenging, as so often in the historical record we find women only in the context of their familial roles. In the medieval period, the task of seeking out and examining friendship among women is made all the more difficult because such relationships are often simply absent from the sources. Perhaps the most significant reason for this absence of female friends in both the historical work and modern scholarship is that the philosophical models of friendship that medieval writers and thinkers adapted from classical philosophy leave out women entirely, since women were thought to inherently lack the necessary virtues to establish and maintain friendships. Indeed, often this exclusion was implicit rather than explicit; by their very physiological nature – women were considered naturally weaker in spirit, more malleable, inherently submissive – women could not possibly enter into the type of relationships described by Cicero or Aristotle.

Furthermore, because women were primarily identified in the context of their family; because there existed in medieval society a persistent concern about women gathering together, particularly outside the observation of men; and because the sources often reflected the concerns and interests of their predominantly male authorship, friendship among women is not readily apparent within the historical record. But as scholars of women's history are already too well aware, this absence of women on the surface should not – indeed must not – prevent us from asking questions about women's

lives, activities, and attitudes. Exploring medieval women's relationships with one another beyond the bonds of blood and kin adds another perspective through which to gather more fully the lived experiences of women in the Middle Ages.

The specific context of medieval Italy during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries – in particular, the growth in lay spirituality and developments in civil society during this period – make this time and place a particularly interesting period for examining friendship among women. As discussed in Chapter Four, Italian writers and thinkers of the late medieval period began to theorize models of friendship that were relevant to the particular political circumstances of the Italian city-states. The form of friendship that was developed in these models, and which became more clearing defined towards the end of the fifteenth century, can be termed, I suggest, civil friendship. Civil friendship, in this understanding, refers to friendship formed and maintained by citizens or (particularly in the case of women) city inhabitants that reflect the values of Italian urban life. I have argued that while among men these friendships were both more formal and more visible in the historical record, friendship was a fundamental aspect of women's urban experience and civil identity in medieval Italy, as women developed intra-neighborhood networks of female friends that expanded traditional familial connections. These networks of female friends served several purposes: providing support and companionship, as well as creating a structure for engaging in charity and civil acts.

The spiritual developments in Italy during this period – specifically the explosion of female lay saints in Italy – has provided historians with a fascinating type of source through which to examine the lives and experiences of laywomen. These are the *vitae* of female

saints who in different ways sought to pursue a pious lifestyle. In these *vitae*, networks of women formed part of the social landscape through which the saint circulated. While independent holy women were described by their hagiographers as having abandoned the world, this did not necessarily include giving up one's friendships; indeed for a holy woman it could not. I have noted many times that certainly women would have had friends as we would understand that relationship today; neighbors would help each other out, kin and companions would join each other at times of celebration and support each other through tragedy and crisis. We see evidence of this represented in the *vitae*, both by the saint herself and the women she lived among. But other women also had particular roles when it came to holy women. As was discussed in the second chapter, the presence of laywomen enabled holy women to remain independent in the secular world by furnishing the practical essentials that the pious woman might not provide for herself. While the visit of confessors or other male church figures gave to the individual holy woman and her way of life some clerical authority, the presence of other respectable women provided her protection from slander and even physical assault. Furthermore through these *vitae* of female saints we can see that for these hagiographers, and perhaps for those who sought to encourage women towards a more devout life, representing female friendships within the *vitae* was strategic to ensure the acceptability of this new way of life, and to provide for the good, well to do women of Italian cities with a framework for piety within the context of family and civil society. Thus even women who were not confidantes to the saint, like Angela of Foligno's companion Masazuoloa, or granted special access to her spiritual experiences, like Margareta was in the *vita* of Benvenuta, were essential figures in the experiences of all these holy women.

The networks of women and descriptions of close female companionship that are described in the *vitae* indicate that within the cities of Italy, establishing friendships was an integral part of city life for women. While some of the friendships that are described are particularly close or intimate, when considering these *vitae* as a group, a holy woman's friendships and associations with others of her sex and status appear to represent what was a common aspect of any women's experience during that time and place. Indeed, these interactions are depicted as ordinary, rather than extraordinary, and it is their normalness that is most telling of the importance of these relationships. That Margaret of Cortona was continually confronted with the challenge of female networks of support, such as the kind neighbors who brought her food; that Umiliana de Cerchi continued to maintain close friendships; that Angela of Foligno confided in her companion more than her confessor; and that despite the general monastic concern about friendship (and recalling Augustine of Hippo's failure in a similar venture) Chiara de Montefalco established a convent from her already established group of friends – all these examples show that female friendship was an integral aspect of the lives of women, even when such relationships were not identified specifically as *amicitia*.

The *vitae* of lay saints certainly provide useful representations of such networks, which in turn give color to much less evident sources for tracing female networks. This study ended with a discussion of a small collection of women's wills. On their own, perhaps, those brief appearances of women who we might be able to identify as friends seem scant evidence at best of the significance of friendship in the lives of medieval Italian women. But when considered alongside the depiction of friendships and women's networks within the *vitae*, these hints of women's lived experience suggest that female friendship and networks

of support were not simply present in women's lives, but that they had meaning in the context of a woman's civil identity. This line of inquiry, still incomplete, is not about simply finding evidence of female friendship but about examining the specific form and function of those relationships, within a society that conceptualized friendship in formal ways. Women's friendships were rarely described explicitly as such – rarely labeled *amicitia* or *amicizia* in Italian – and, as was discussed at length in the first chapter, women were implicitly excluded from any philosophical or political construction of friendship, yet within the urban centers of medieval Italy, we have seen, through reading together literary representations and archival documents, that the bonds that women made with other women were essential to their lives in the city, and suggest that further archival explorations will bear fruit. Women lived much of their lives in the company of other women – both family and friends – and these relationships helped shape women's lived experiences, part of which was their role and place in their family, neighborhoods, parishes, and cities.

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